

HB0706: Written Testimony - SUPPORT

February 25, 2020

Dear Chair Pendergrass, Vice-Chair Pena-Melnyk, and Members of the HGO Committee:

My name is Manuel Martinez and I strongly **Support HB0706 - *Commission on LGBTQ Affairs***. I am a resident of Rockville, MD, who identifies as queer. Since ancient times, the LGBTQ community has endured unjust persecution and discrimination. Humans tend to fear what they don't understand or perceive as different. Often, this fear is manifested in the form of hate. Our country has not been immune to such discrimination and hatred towards the LGBTQ community. For centuries, our people have suffered in the dark, until we could no longer tolerate the level of persecution that we were subjected to, and we decided to fight back for our right to even exist.

The Pride Movement brought our fight for equality and justice into the mainstream media starting in 1969 with the Stonewall riots. This helped the American public to understand where we are coming from, and the future we all dream of. In the decades following the Stonewall riots, our community has been slowly but steadily gaining victories in our fight for true equality. With the most significant one being the institution of Marriage Equality in 2015. But for every step forward, there seem to be two steps backwards. Far Right Movements have been looking for revenge since the Supreme Court struck down bans on same-sex marriage. Since the majority of the population supports same-sex marriages, these far right movements have come up with disgusting new ways to discriminate against our community. They are architecting Religion Freedom Protection laws which are just shields to discriminate against LGBTQ individuals. Such laws allow employers to fire employees, or business owners and service providers to refuse services to customers and patients based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. Many of these hate-filled bills are specifically targeting the transgender community, the most vulnerable in our community, due to the large amount of discrimination that they are subject to. Attacking the weakest members of a community is typical bully behavior. From being denied to

serve in the military, to being denied to safely use public restrooms, our transgender siblings are seeing their rights stripped away.

I strongly believe that the establishment of a Commission on LGBTQ Affairs will be a big step forward in the fight for justice and equality in the state of Maryland. This commission will be able to advise the Governor and state agencies regarding policies, programs and legislation that impact the LGBTQ community and guarantee that such advice come from knowledgeable individuals who have experienced firsthand the impact of discrimination. We have come a long way in the state of Maryland in our fight for equality, but there is still much more that needs to be done. For example:

- It is still possible to get a reduced sentence in Maryland for harming or killing an individual because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. What is so threatening about me that can cause such panic in another person to the point where they decide to inflict violence upon me?
- My tax payer money is being used to pay for Charter schools that discriminate against LGBTQ students.

The establishment of the Commission on LGBTQ Affairs will ensure the review and prioritization of disgraceful bills like the ones mentioned before, as well as strengthening the ones that are working well for our community. It will not only benefit LGBTQ residents in the state of Maryland, but also nationwide because it will help pave the road for others. The entire country looks up to Maryland as a leader when it comes to LGBTQ rights; therefore, we need to use that power wisely. I personally relocated here from Indiana with my boyfriend because we were seeking a state that we could call home where we could feel safe as a young gay couple.

I urge a **Favorable Report on HB0706**.

Thank you for your time,

Manuel Martinez

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