



Maryland General Assembly
Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

February 6, 2020

Re: SUPPORT for H.B. 0541, Testimony from the Human Rights Campaign in support of the bill requiring police officer training on hate crime laws

Dear Chairperson Clippinger and Members of the Committee:

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC), on behalf of its more than three million members and supporters, including more than 160,000 members and supporters in Maryland, thanks you for the opportunity to submit testimony on H.B. 0541, a vital measure that would require all police officers to be thoroughly trained on existing hate crime laws. We urge you to swiftly pass this important legislation.

HRC is America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) equality. By inspiring and engaging all Americans, HRC strives to end discrimination against LGBTQ people and realize a world that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all. As an advocate for LGBTQ individuals, HRC is a strong proponent of laws and policies that seek to safeguard LGBTQ people and other marginalized communities from the rising scourge of hate crimes.

Every year, thousands of violent hate crimes occur, affecting not only the victims and their families, but also the entire communities they target. Sadly, LGBTQ people are disproportionately the target of these crimes. The latest 2018 Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) hate crimes report revealed that although the overall number of reported hate crimes decreased slightly since 2017, incidents based on the victim's sexual orientation or gender identity increased from nearly 18% of all reported incidents in the previous year to nearly 19% in 2018.¹ This report revealed that an alarming 1,634 victims were targeted based on their sexual

¹ U.S. Department of Justice, *Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2018 Hate Crime Statistics* (Nov. 2019) ; U.S. Department of Justice, *Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2017 Hate Crime Statistics* (Nov. 2018)



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orientation or gender identity in 2018, 136 more than in 2017.² Importantly, because reporting hate crimes to the FBI is purely voluntary under federal law, the actual number of hate crimes across the country is drastically larger than the FBI's latest report indicates. Additionally, according to a recent U.S. Department of Justice report, about 54% of hate crime victimizations between 2004 and 2015 were not even reported to local police.³

This unfortunate reality demands bold action. H.B. 0541 would strengthen Maryland's existing LGBTQ-inclusive hate crime laws by requiring entrance-level and in-service police training throughout the state on recognizing, responding to, and reporting hate crimes based on all protected characteristics, including sexual orientation and gender identity. This will help ensure that police officials are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively implement the state's hate crime laws and encourage more accurate data collection and reporting.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in favor of this critical bill to protect the safety of all Maryland residents.

Sincerely,

Sarah Warbelow
Legal Director
Human Rights Campaign

² *Id.*

³ U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Hate Crime Victimization, 2004-2015, Special Report* (June 2017). <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/hcv0415.pdf>.