



March 2, 2021

Testimony on behalf of the Maryland LGBT Chamber of Commerce

Supporting SB 765 | Imari's Business Pride Act

A Bill to Include LGBT-Owned Businesses in Maryland Economic Opportunity Programs for Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Individual

We are grateful for your time to review the benefits that will come from including certified LGBT Business Enterprises under the existing MBE/DBE program in the State of Maryland. I am representing both the Maryland LGBT Chamber of Commerce as a Board Member as well as CEO of BRAC Consulting Group, LLC. A certified LGBTBE through the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce, as well as a Maryland MBE/DBE/SBE.

We understand that the Maryland MBE program has the highest standards for accreditation, for this we are proud to have obtained this level of credibility/certification from the state. We understand that the MBE program is designed this way to ensure that qualified businesses can deliver once admitted into the program.

I am a gay man from Puerto Rico, who was raised in a religious organization that made me hate who I was. Add to that a culture that is homophobic and had no tolerance for any deviation from what is expected of a latinx man. To the point where at 18 years old, suicide was contemplated. I was born and instantly chains were wrapped around me, secured with a lock to which I did not know the code. Iron chains that had accumulated rust of hundreds of years of oxidation. This rust represents ideologies throughout generations that were intolerant to anything that was different. It was not until later in life that I deciphered the code to that lock, it was a synergistic combination of confidence and love.

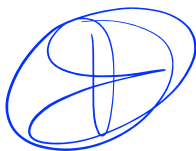
Before I was able to break free, I quietly benefitted from the privilege of being a cis male in the corporate world. Even more so, my identity as a gay man was never discussed or even suspected. The weight of those iron chains reminded me that while I was enjoying heightened levels of success, I could not bring the parts of me that could make others uncomfortable. While doing so, you are constantly using mental resources to be who is expected and not who you truly are. Precious mental resources that could be used to innovate and thrive as a professional are tied up in creating a heightened level of anxiety, constantly curating your every action as to not set off any alarms for others. Making sure I did not make “too much noise” in being true to myself, and perpetuating the status quo.



Biology teaches us that diverse populations are at an advantage, they can adapt to challenges and overcome diseases more efficiently. This is the same for diversity and inclusion in business, why creating a large diversity supplier pool will propel Maryland and its small businesses to greater heights. Diversity means that EVERYONE will have a seat at the table, that we can remain competitive, and make better use of Maryland tax dollars. Diversity creates an open-door atmosphere that lets people bring their authentic selves to the table 100% of the time. That solutions, thoughts, and problem solving can be even greater when we ALL come together. Creating more and more jobs for those that were overlooked, simply because who they loved made them unqualified as a professional in the eyes of others who do not understand the beauty in diversity. It will create change-agent accountability for all of us, understanding that we cannot benefit from these programs if we do not actively seek to help/include others. We are better when we empower each other, when we let people know that we celebrate our diversity without having to worry about who we are.

We do not seek to take away from the community that is already in the MWBE pool, but to add to it by enriching its diversity through goals that are intentional with inclusion. Therefore, I ask of you, to include us by opening the door of opportunity to the LGBT business community as recognized Minority and Disadvantaged Businesses. We want to continue to add value to the powerful state of Maryland, because we know we are greater together.

Thank you for your time and consideration,



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