
BILL NO: House Bill 130
TITLE: Commission on LGBTQ Affairs
COMMITTEE: Health and Government Operations
HEARING DATE: January 14, 2021
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Women's Law Center of Maryland (WLC) is a statewide, non-profit legal services provider, dedicated to ensuring the physical safety, the economic security, and the bodily autonomy of women across Maryland. Established in 1971 with a mission of improving and protecting the legal rights of women, particularly regarding gender discrimination, employment law, family law and reproductive rights, the WLC advances its work not only through direct legal representation, but also through statewide educational hotlines and advocacy. The WLC recognizes that the concerns and struggles of the LGBTQ community impact all women, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or socio-economic status.

In 2016, the civil rights advocacy organization FreeState Justice conducted a Needs Assessment of LGBTQ Marylanders to better understand the barriers they continue to face in accessing basic services. The survey made clear that a host of challenges exist for many LGBTQ-identifying Marylanders and that a lack of a data, resources, and a coordinated response contribute to those obstacles.

The establishment of a statewide Commission on LGBTQ Affairs would be a first step in addressing the significant and varied challenges the LGBTQ community faces as they navigate employment, healthcare, education, housing, and other fundamental matters of concern. A Commission would be able to gather information, expertise, perspectives, and resources from across sectors to support state and local governments working to ensure equality and dignity for all Marylanders.

For these reasons, the WLC supports HB130 and urges a favorable report.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a private, non-profit, legal services organization that serves as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women. It advocates for the rights of women through legal assistance to individuals and strategic initiatives to achieve systemic change, working to ensure physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy for women in Maryland.