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FreeState Justice is a Maryland lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) legal services and advocacy organization. Each year, we provide free legal services hundreds of low-income LGBTQ Marylanders who could not otherwise be able to afford an attorney. We strive to create an equitable Maryland where LGBTQ Marylanders can live full lives with safety, dignity and respect in all spaces.

Despite significant advances in recent years, the LGBTQ community continues to face discrimination, harassment, and violence at rates significantly above state and national averages. Our 2016 state-wide Needs Assessment, *Pushing Back: A Blue Print for Change*¹, had **27.4% of respondents identifying street harassment, including physical assault, property damage, intimidation, and verbal harassment as an urgent issue. Additionally, 56% of those in our Needs Assessment reported altering their daily routines to minimize bias-related threats.** The needs assessment findings align with national reports exploring the impact of street harassment within LGBTQ populations. The Center for American Progress released a 2017 report sharing the findings of a national LGBTQ survey. The report highlighted the correlation between street harassment and social isolation. A significant number of respondents reported experiencing social isolation as a direct result of street harassment: 23.9% of LGBTQ people reported avoiding social situations due to fear of discrimination, and 12% avoided public places.² Another national study found that over half of the sample (57%) have heard slurs and/or offensive comments about their gender identity and/or sexual orientation.³ 51% of respondents reported being physically assaulted and sexually harassed.¹⁵

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¹ Pushing Back: A Blue Print for Change – Lesson Learned from the 2016 Needs Assessment of LGBTQ Marylanders (2018). Retrieved <https://freestate-justice.org/contact-us-2/needs-assessment/>.

² Center for American Progress, “Widespread Discrimination Continues to Shape LGBT People’s Lives in Both Subtle and Significant Ways” . (2017).

Retrieved <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbt/news/2017/05/02/429529/widespread-discrimination-continues-shape-lgbtpeoples-lives-subtle-significant-ways>

³ National Public Radio, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Discrimination in America: Experiences and Views of LGBTQ Americans .(2017).

¹⁵ Ibid

FreeState Justice, Inc. (formerly FreeState Legal Project, Inc., merging with Equality Maryland)
is a social justice organization that works through direct legal services, legislative and policy advocacy, and community engagement to enable Marylanders across the spectrum of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer identities to be free to live authentically, with safety and dignity, in all communities throughout our state.

Beyond harassment & violence in public spaces, hate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity are the third most common type of hate crime following race, ethnicity, and ancestry (R/E/A) and religious incidents⁴.

Additionally, according to the Maryland State Police 2017 Hate/Bias Report, of 183 verified hate crimes committed in 2017, 21 were committed based on the victim's sexual orientation, with an additional 12 based on the victim's gender identity.⁵ In 2019, at least three Black trans women were killed in Maryland: Ashanti Carmon⁶ and Zoe Spears⁷ in Fairmount Heights, Prince George's County, and Bailey Reeves in Baltimore.⁸

These deaths, and others like them across the country, have left many LGBTQ Marylanders, especially transgender Marylanders, feeling under attack. Senate Bill 220 would create and offer an anti-bias program to perpetrators of hate crimes. This opportunity for restorative justice within our justice system would contribute to the public education regarding the livelihood and dignity of LGBTQ individuals.

For this reason, FreeState Justice urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 220.



Jeremy LaMaster Executive Director

(pronouns: he/him | they/them)

⁴ FBI Releases 2019 Hate Crime Statistics (2019). US Department of Justice. Retrieved <https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/hate-crime-statistics>

⁵ Maryland State Police, State of Maryland 2017 Hate/Bias Report (Sept. 1, 2018) at 5, available at <http://www.mcac.maryland.gov/resources/2017%20Maryland%20Hate%20Bias%20Report.pdf>.

⁶ See Tim Fitzsimons, "'She did not deserve that': Trans woman fatally shot in Maryland," NBC News (April 1, 2019), available at <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/she-did-not-deserve-trans-woman-fatally-shot-maryland-n989751>.

⁷ See Natalie Delgadillo, "Community Mourns Zoe Spears, Second Trans Woman Killed on Eastern Avenue This Year," DCist (June 17, 2019), available at <https://dcist.com/story/19/06/17/community-mourns-zoe-spears-second-trans-woman-killed-on-eastern-avenue-this-year/>.

⁸ See "At vigil for transgender teen killed in Baltimore, LGBTQ community stresses unity in face of violence," The Baltimore Sun (Sept. 6, 2019), available at <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/crime/bs-md-ci-cr-17-year-old-transgender-teen-killed-20190907-dvsu63crwjf7pmqtiub3rxl3e-story.html>.



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