

# State of Maryland

## Commission on Civil Rights

*“Our vision is to have a State that is free from any trace of unlawful discrimination.”*



### *Officers*

Alvin O. Gillard, Executive Director  
Nicolette Young, Assistant Director  
Glendora C. Hughes, General Counsel

Governor  
Larry Hogan  
Lt. Governor  
Boyd K. Rutherford  
Commission Chairperson  
Gary C. Norman, Esq.  
Commission Vice Chairperson  
Roberto N. Allen, Esq.  
Commissioners  
Allison U. Dichoso, Esq.  
Hayden B. Duke  
Janssen E. Evelyn, Esq.  
Eileen M. Levitt, SPHR, SHRM-SCP  
Rabbi Binyamin Marwick  
Jeff Rosen  
Gina McKnight-Smith, PharmD, MBA

**February 1, 2022**

### **House Bill 159 – Economic Justice and Racial Reconciliation Act** **POSITION: Support**

Dear Chairperson Pendergrass, Vice Chairperson Pena-Melnyk, and Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee:

The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (“MCCR”; “The Commission”) is the State agency responsible for the enforcement of laws prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, health and state contracts based upon race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, physical and mental disability, and source of income.

House Bill 159 establishes the Commission for Economic Justice and Racial Reconciliation. The commission will study the racial disparities in wealth and resources stemming from tax laws and systems in place between the Reconstruction Era through the enactment of federal Civil Rights Act of 1964. The commission will then make recommendations relating to compensation for affected African American communities. This commission will remain effective for just two years and six months, then it shall be abrogated following inaction by the General Assembly.

There is ample evidence to support the fact that America’s long history of racial injustice has allowed white citizens to acquire more wealth than people of color. For example, within the same tax jurisdiction, people of color pay 10% to 13% more in property taxes than white residents. Additionally, research has shown that the tax code has more negative impacts within poorer communities and communities of color. Therefore, equitable tax reformation requires considering race when discussing policy.

Several states around the country have enacted these types of initiatives successfully, like Oregon, Kansas, and Vermont. Notably, New York created a Racial Justice Commission in 2021 that aimed to root out structural racism and had a similar two-year mandate. That commission has the ability to propose changes to the NYC Charter, making its impact substantial. For example, that commission initiated a ballot proposal that would measure the “true cost of living,” which is basic essential needs, like housing, food, childcare, transportation, and other necessary costs, without considering public, private, or informal assistance. It also requires that an annual report of the true cost of living be published. Initiatives like this not only will have a significant impact on communities of color but also impact other disadvantaged communities.

For these reasons, the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights urges a favorable vote on HB 159. Thank you for your time and consideration of the information contained in this letter. The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights looks forward to the continued opportunity to work with you to improve and promote civil rights in Maryland.