



2526 SAINT PAUL STREET
BALTIMORE, MD 21218
TEL (410) 625-LGBT (5428)
FAX (410) 625-7423
www.freestate-justice.org

February 15, 2022

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Testimony of FreeState Justice

IN SUPPORT OF

SB0486: Places of Public Accommodation and Public Buildings - Gender-Inclusive Signage

To the Honorable Chair William C. Smith, Jr., Vice Chair Jeff Waldstreicher, and esteemed members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

FreeState Justice is Maryland's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) civil rights advocacy organization. Each year, we provide free legal services to dozens, if not hundreds, of LGBTQ+ Marylanders who could not otherwise be able to afford an attorney, as well as advocate more broadly on behalf of the LGBTQ+ community.

We write today in support of Senate Bill 486, which would require single-occupancy restrooms across the state to be designated with gender-neutral signage. This bill will not only benefit nonbinary, transgender, and gender-nonconforming Marylanders, for whom using the restroom can be a particularly stressful experience, it also benefits individuals with disabilities and their caretakers, parents of young children, and anyone who has ever waited in a long line for a gendered restroom while the other sits empty and unused.

Since 2019, Baltimore City has had a similar ordinance, which has required single-occupancy restrooms to be labelled with gender-neutral signage. After more than two years of implementation, there

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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.

have been no unforeseen consequences, no rush of frivolous lawsuits against places of public accommodation, and no wave of sex-related crimes. The sky has not fallen in Baltimore as a result of Ordinance #19-265, nor has it fallen in the multiple other jurisdictions that have implemented similar laws, including the District of Columbia, New York City, or Philadelphia, all of which have been in place since 2016. Indeed, DC's Municipal Rule 4-802 has been in place since 2006, without issue.

FreeState Justice strongly believes that based on the experience in Baltimore City and beyond, requiring single-occupancy restrooms in places of public accommodation to be marked with gender-neutral signage will not have any unforeseen negative repercussions. Instead, it will improve the lives of many Marylanders who are limited by the current gendered nature of many single-occupancy facilities. This includes not only LGBTQ+ Marylanders, but also individuals with disabilities who may simply want to use the nearest restroom, parents and other caretakers who may not be the same gender as the individuals they are caring for, and women across the state, who often find themselves waiting in extraordinarily long lines while the designated "Men's" restroom sits vacant.

For these reasons, FreeState Justice urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 486.