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The Honorable Ben Barnes
House of Delegates Appropriations Committee
Room 121
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
January 27, 2023

**Testimony of FreeState Justice
IN SUPPORT OF
HB0186: Victim Services Programs – Supplementing Federal Funding and Support 3
(Victim Services Stabilization Act)**

To the Honorable Chair Ben Barnes, Vice Chair Mark S. Chang, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee:

FreeState Justice is Maryland’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) civil rights advocacy organization. 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 House Bill 186. Many members of our community are victims of crime, and indeed face increased rates of crimes like street harassment, hate and bias crimes, human trafficking, and elder abuse. LGBTQ+ Marylanders additionally face increased levels of poverty, discrimination, and public health disparities. As a result, we face greater barriers to stability and self-sufficiency for our community—especially where our sexual orientations and gender identities intersect with other factors like race, class, age, and geography—leading to increased vulnerability to crime to revictimization in the future.

This Bill would directly support the work that we do for our community by providing funding to our organization. But stabilizing the State’s Victim Services Programs also ensures that the

*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.*

resources we connect our clients to are robust, reliable, and durable—which in turn helps every Marylander who finds themselves to be a victim of crime.

FreeState Justice urges a favorable report on House Bill 186.

Phillip Westry, Esq.

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