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The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
February 6, 2023

Testimony of FreeState Justice

IN SUPPORT OF SB0251: Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs - Alterations

To the Honorable Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair Cheryl C. Kagan, and the esteemed committee:

FreeState Justice, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) organization. The mission of FreeState Justice, Inc. is to improve the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (“LGBTQIA+”) Marylanders. Programs include direct legal services, legislative advocacy, and community education and empowerment services. Our mission is to create a Maryland where the most vulnerable community members — including youth, communities of color, and transgender/gender-nonconforming folks — feel safe and empowered to live their lives authentically.

We write today in support of Senate Bill 251. The LGBTQIA+ community remains particularly vulnerable to marginalization, which is reflected in increased levels of poverty, public health disparities, and susceptibility to crime. All of which results in greater barriers to stability and self-sufficiency for the community, especially at the intersections of race, gender identity, age, and geography.

FreeState Justice supports changing the name of the LGBTQ Commission from LGBTQ to “LGBTQIA+” to reflect the diversity and lived experience of the community. We also support the expansion of the board from 15 to 21 members and efforts to bring in voices across racial, ethnic, age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic, and residency. All of the proposed changes will help lift the voice of LGBTQIA+ people across Maryland while reducing stigma and discrimination.

FreeState Justice urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 251.

Phillip Westry, Esq. || *Executive Director, FreeState Justice*

*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.*