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The Honorable Melony G. Griffith, Chair  
Senate Finance Committee  
Miller Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
February 26, 2023

### **Testimony of FreeState Justice**

#### **IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 460**

To the Honorable Chair Griffith, Vice Chair Klausmeier, esteemed committee members:

My name is Tina Jones and I serve as the Deputy Executive Director for FreeState Justice, Maryland's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) civil rights advocacy organization. I also am the co-founder of the Delmarva Pride Center and the founder and facilitator of Delmarva Gender Expression Movement (GEM) a transgender support group on the Eastern Shore. I stand before you today as a transgender woman who knows firsthand the importance of providing the medical services covered by the Trans Health Equity Act.

Living without the ability to be myself for most of my life took an emotional and physical toll on me. I was depressed, I drank too much. I engaged in unsafe behaviors. I was unable to be there for my family in the way I should have been. Even with years of therapy I saw myself as less than a person. Eventually I attempted suicide.

I was hospitalized and spent another 15+ years in therapy. Things only changed when I accepted myself. But personal acceptance was not enough. I needed to physically change..

I was lucky. I had good insurance. I was able to get the surgeries I needed. I will never forget waking up from surgery, looking down and crying. But I still needed more. Because I waited until later in life, I had a deep voice, facial hair, and male pattern baldness. I continued to suffer trauma at the hands of strangers. I was shunned. I was labeled a pedophile and groomer. I received death threats.

Those things changed when I was able to address my voice, my beard, and my hair. I am extremely fortunate. I was able to pay for those things. Today I am a proud, confident woman because of the wonderful care I received.. Those procedures saved my life.

We live in the greatest nation in the world yet we struggle with saving the lives of those who are different. We often use cost as the reason for not doing the right thing. We struggled with funding HIV research in the 80's when thousands of people were dying. We have struggled with providing services to people of color throughout our history.

None of us deserves to be forced to live a life of trauma, bias, harm and possible death because of who we are. None of us should be forced to forgo life saving medical care because we cannot afford it. We are all human, we all matter. Please, show your support for our community. Please issue a favorable report on SB 460.

Thank you,

Tina Grace Jones (she/her)  
Deputy Executive Director