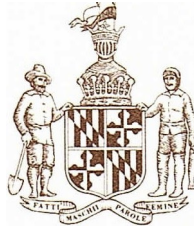


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Health and Government
Operations Committee

Subcommittees
Government Operations and
Health Facilities

Public Health and Minority
Health Disparities



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 8, 2023

SUPPORT

HB871 - Declaration of Rights - Religious Freedom, Religious Tests, and Oaths and Affirmations

Chair Peña-Melnyk, Vice-chair Cullison, and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee,

HB871 offers a constitutional amendment which, subject to voter approval, updates the language in the Maryland Constitution to reflect the equal treatment under the law, regardless of religious belief or non-belief, that Maryland and Marylander's purport to subscribe, thereby (re)establishing the constitutional underpinnings to support our laws.

Specifically, **HB871**

- Alters language in Articles 36 and 37 to clarify that religious freedom is not reserved for followers of Abrahamic religions, or of any other defined religion, but is conferred equally to believers in God, a god, gods, non-gods, no god, and in nothing or no one at all.
- Repeals Article 39, consistent with the long-standing practice of administering oaths of office without reference to religious belief.
- Substitutes gender-neutral language to clarify that references to the rights and responsibilities are understood and intended to apply equally across gender.

It should be expected that a document with origins in the 1777 Maryland Declaration of Rights, written in 1781, which has had a couple of rewrites, and been amended multiple times, would need additional correction. After all, when we know better, we do better. Or we should.

It is important we fix this language so that the fact of its existence does not become the legal justification for invalidation of statute, undermining of legislative intent, or denial of individual rights or freedoms. I request a favorable report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Terri Hill".