



Testimony to the House Appropriations Committee

HB0871 Declaration of Rights - Religious Freedom, Religious Tests, and Oaths and Affirmations

Bill Sponsor: Delegate Hill

Committee: House Appropriations Committee

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Aileen Alex, Executive Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of HB0871 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists, and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

A vestige of European custom, all 13 of the original American colonies required an attestation of religious belief or affiliation — a religious oath — as a prerequisite for an individual to hold public office. The Supreme Court finally ruled on religious tests in 1961, when it found Maryland’s constitutional requirement that every state official declare a “belief in the existence of God” was a violation of the free exercise clause of the First Amendment. (<https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/927/religious-oaths>, accessed 2/28/2023).

It is now time to allow the voters to remove remaining references to god from oaths and affirmations administered in Maryland. The discrimination against atheists and other groups that don’t believe in the Judeo-Christian version of god is self-evident and needs to be eliminated. The law should not be a vehicle for advancing and specific religious beliefs.

The Maryland Legislative Coalition supports efforts that reduce discrimination. We ask that the Committee issue a favorable report on HB0871.