

House Bill 426
Correctional Facilities - Transgender, Nonbinary, and Intersex Inmates
Transgender Respect, Agency, and Dignity Act
February 17, 2023
Support

Dear Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Sophia Connell, and I am a software Engineer with the National Federation of the Blind residing in District 40. As a transgender Marylander, I support House Bill 426, the Trans Respect, Agency, and Dignity Act, as it would greatly improve protections for a vulnerable population. Transgender persons that are incarcerated are ten times more likely to experience sexual violence than the general population; often at the hands of guards and other prison employees.

While we are a small portion of the population, often due to discrimination we are more likely to end up incarcerated. Given how many trans inmates report being sexually harassed by correctional facility staff, which is around 52%, and over ten percent reported being sexually assaulted by guards, I feel it is best to offer vulnerable inmates greater protections. A plethora of lawsuits have stemmed from sexual violence in prisons and jails. Multiple states and the federal government have had to pay out money in settlements and litigation due to the rampant sexual abuse of prisoners over the past decade, and I do not feel that a good use of state money is to have to pay settlements due to the open contempt for trans people our correctional facilities are allowed to show.

That contempt has even been deadly, as was the case in 2021 with Kim Writz, who was found dead in a male holding area of Baltimore Central Booking, despite her request to be housed in more gender appropriate housing. Even when the violence is not deadly, studies have shown that the trauma one endures deteriorates mental health. This often leads to further housing and financial instability, which can lead to a person being incarcerated multiple times, further wasting the state's resources and trapping Marylanders in a cycle of dysfunction.

Preventing these tragedies is the correct thing to do from an ethical standpoint, and it is also a solid financial decision. HB426 will prevent litigation against our state, and prevent Maryland from having to incarcerate more vulnerable people, reducing their ability to function as productive residents and contribute to our great state. For these reasons, I ask that the Judiciary Committee return a favorable report on HB426, the Trans Respect, Agency, and Dignity Act.

Thank you,
Sophia Connell