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The Honorable Luke Clippinger
House Judiciary Committee
Room 101
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
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**Testimony of FreeState Justice in Support
HB1066: Hate Crimes - Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention -
Establishment**

To the Honorable Luke Clippinger, Vice Chair David Moon, and the esteemed committee: FreeState Justice is Maryland's civil rights advocacy organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) Marylanders. We also provide pro bono legal services each year to hundreds of LGBTQIA+ Marylanders who could not otherwise afford an attorney and we advocate more broadly on behalf of the LGBTQIA+ community.

We write in favor of HB1066, which creates and staffs a Commission on Hate Crimes Response and Prevention within the Office of the Attorney General. The Commission is tasked with “[developing] strategies to prevent and respond to hate crime activity [and] evaluat[ing] state laws and policies relating to hate crimes.”¹ The Attorney General or his Designee is the Chair of the Commission² and appoints Commissioners.³ The bill provides funding to the Commission for one full time Assistant Attorney General and additional operation and maintenance funds.⁴ Appointed Commissioners are not compensated for their work.⁵

HB1066 designates FreeState Justice and 19 other Maryland-based organizations that represent various at-risk communities as Commissioners, as well as 2 additional members of the public.⁶ It gives each Commissioner a 4-year term, and sets up a system of staggered vacancies, sunseting each original Commissioner's term according to a set schedule.⁷

¹ §6-702 (H)

² §6-702 (D)(1)

³ §6-702 (B)

⁴ §6-702 (E)

⁵ §6-702 (C)(1)

⁶ §6-702 (B)(7) (mentions FreeState Justice; (B) generally contains the list of Commissioners.

⁷ §6-702 (C) (also allows Commissioners to serve until they are replaced by a qualified successor to ensure continuity).

The Commission must transmit a report⁸ to the General Assembly on or before December 1, 2024 and each subsequent year that issues policy recommendations for addressing hate crimes in the state, and an additional report to the Dept. of Education that consists of policy recommendations for reducing similar incidents in schools.⁹

National sources point to increasing rates of hate crimes and violence against minority groups broadly, and the LGBTQ+ community specifically.¹⁰ Just over the last four years in Maryland there have been several widely reported incidents targeting LGBTQ+ people, and there have even been recent federal indictments issued against “racially or ethnically motivated extremists” plotting to destroy Baltimore’s power grid.¹¹ The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights found that “[t]he trend continues to remain that racial minorities, religious minorities, and members of the LGBTQ+ community are more likely to be targets of hate and bias than those Marylanders who are Caucasian, Christian, and/or heterosexual.”¹² Radicalized individuals and organized hate groups are encouraged by dangerous and escalating rhetoric from government officials across the country—a violent and even deadly feedback loop.¹³ In the face of these threats, it is crucial that the Government of Maryland shows its continued commitment to protecting all of its citizens from hate crime.

As Maryland’s statewide LGBTQIA+ legal advocacy organization, it is our mission to work on behalf of our community to achieve true justice—which includes finding ways to reduce the hate motivated violence perpetrated against our community. We are eager to work closely with the Attorney General and a strong coalition of organizations representing vastly diverse communities from across the state to address hate crimes and are thankful for the opportunity to elevate the pressing issues facing our state’s LGBTQIA+ community to the Commission.

For these reasons, FreeState Justice urges a favorable ruling on House Bill 1066.

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⁸ The Report must be in accordance with §2-1257 of the State Government Article.

⁹ §6-702 (I)

¹⁰ [ACLE](#) “Nearly 200 anti-LGBT+ incidents [had] been reported [by November 2022], marking an increase of three times compared to 2021 and 12 times compared to 2020.”; DOJ Hate Crime Statistics [2021](#), [2020](#), [2019](#); NPR: [Hate Crimes Reach The Highest Level In More Than A Decade](#) (2021)

¹¹ [Washington Blade](#) June 2022 Pride Flags Burn; [WMAR2](#) May 2022 Pride Flags Burn; [Baltimore Sun](#) 2019 Pride Flag Burn; Washington Post: [Montgomery police to patrol drag story hours after Proud Boys protest](#) (Feb. 2023); CBS: [2 Arrested for Conspiring to Attack Baltimore Power Grid](#) (Feb. 2023)

¹² [MCCR](#) 2022 Annual Report, p. 42

¹³ [Bloomberg News](#) (connecting Right-wing anti-LGBTQ+ legislation to the Club Q shooting in Colorado, and hate/violence nationally) (Nov. 2022)