

Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby, Honorable Committee Members—

My name is Brandon Russell, and I live in St. Mary's County. I'm testifying to urge a favorable report on HB602, adding sexual orientation as a class protected from employment discrimination. I understand this is largely to close a legal loophole as a result of a decision from the Maryland Supreme Court last year. However, I have an example showing why this is important.

Situations still exist where a lack of representation contributes to rights being overlooked. In a previous employment position at a small business, I was the only LGBTQ+ person on staff. I was tasked with rewriting and updating the employee handbook. During the process I included sexual orientation and gender identity in the list of protected classes throughout all discrimination policies. It is not enough to rely on the term "protected classes" alone, assuming the reader will know it may include disability, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender, marital status, age, citizenship, ancestry, national origin, religion, and others depending on local laws.

The same is true of the law. It is necessary to include sexual orientation as a protected class, affirming employment discrimination is unacceptable. I am an LGBTQ+ Marylander, and actively involved in volunteering to make my local community a more welcoming place. Efforts, like this legislation, to protect our community has a meaningful impact on our everyday lives.

I urge your favorable report for this bill.

Thank you,

Brandon Russell
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