



**Maryland Commission  
on LGBTQIA+ Affairs**

**TESTIMONY OF JEREMY BROWNING  
DIRECTOR, MARYLAND COMMISSION ON LGBTQIA+ AFFAIRS  
FAVORABLE STATEMENT ON HB1397  
HUMAN RELATIONS - DISCRIMINATION - PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS**

**March 6, 2024**

Economic Matters Committee

The Hon. C. T. Wilson, Chair  
The Hon. Brian M. Crosby, Vice Chair

Chair Wilson, Vice-Chair Crosby, and members of the Economic Matters Committee, my name is Jeremy Browning (he/him), and I am the Director of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs. The Commission was created by the 2021 Maryland General Assembly, and later altered in 2023, to assess challenges facing our LGBTQIA+ communities, establish best practices and recommendations for LGBTQIA+ inclusion, and provide testimony to legislative and administrative bodies.

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs is in strong support of House Bill 1397. This legislation is a crucial step to close gaps in Maryland's anti-discrimination laws and expand protections against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, race, religious beliefs, marital status, and disability across various spheres of Maryland law.

Despite significant progress in recent years, discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals remains a significant barrier to equality and economic opportunity in our State. Many LGBTQIA+ community members continue to face discrimination, harassment, and unequal treatment in employment, healthcare, and housing settings solely because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and other protected characteristics. This perpetuates systemic inequalities that harm individuals by undermining their ability to live authentically, access affirming healthcare, and support themselves and their families.

Last year, the Maryland Supreme Court's decision *John Doe v. CRS* ruled that the Maryland Equal Pay for Equal Work Act does not prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and that the Maryland Fair Employment Practices Act permits religious organizations to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. Additionally, this ruling has broad implications for all protected classes and leaves gaps in our State's anti-discrimination laws which House Bill 1397 addresses.

House Bill 1397 explicitly prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, and other protected characteristics in sectors ranging from employment to housing to healthcare. By repealing and reenacting various statutes with amendments to explicitly include sexual orientation, gender identity, and other protected characteristics, this bill ensures that our legal framework is robust, addressing gaps throughout the code, to protect all Marylanders against discrimination.

For these reasons, the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs strongly urges a favorable report on House Bill 1397.