



**Maryland Commission
on LGBTQIA+ Affairs**

**TESTIMONY OF JEREMY BROWNING
DIRECTOR, MARYLAND COMMISSION ON LGBTQIA+ AFFAIRS
FAVORABLE STATEMENT ON HB0602
EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION - SEXUAL ORIENTATION**

February 21, 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 602. This legislation is a crucial step to close gaps in Maryland's anti-discriminations laws and expand protections against employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in Maryland.

House Bill 602 explicitly prohibits employers from discriminating against employees based on sexual orientation when it comes to wages and employment opportunities. This legislation takes a balanced approach and promotes fairness and equality in the workplace while allowing for legitimate variations in compensation and advancement based on factors such as seniority, merit, and job requirements.

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 settings solely because of their

sexual orientation. This perpetuates systemic inequalities that harm individuals by undermining their ability to 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, the ruling has broad implications for all protected classes and leaves gaps in our State's anti-discrimination laws.

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs urges a favorable report on House Bill 602, however more comprehensive legislation is needed to shield protected classes in Maryland from discrimination as proposed in HB1397/SB590.