



Board of Directors

Chair

Joe Toolan

(he/him)

Vice-Chair

Katie Connolly

(they/them)

Treasurer

Dennis McGowan

(he/him)

Secretary

Jaden Farris

(he/him)

Valerie Anias

(she/her)

Christine Feldmann

(she/her)

Mastin Fowler

(he/him)

Chris Haley

(he/him)

David Jones

(he/him)

Heather Maher

(she/her)

Nicole McCoy

(she/her)

Jessica Parsell

(she/her)

Sarah Sample

(she/her)

Joshua Seefried

(he/him)

Jayne Walters

(she/her)

Tim Williams

(he/him)

BILL: Senate Bill 134 - Office of the Attorney General - Correctional Ombudsman Unit

DATE: February 7, 2024

POSITION: FAVORABLE

COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings

CONTACT: Jaden Farris | jaden@annapolispride.org

Annapolis Pride's mission is to advocate for, empower, and celebrate the LGBTQ+ community in Anne Arundel County to live fully and authentically. Our vision is a safe, equitable, and anti-racist community where people of all identities thrive.

As such, Annapolis Pride supports Senate Bill 134, which establishes an independent Correctional Ombudsman Unit (COU) within the Office of the Attorney General. This legislation represents a critical step forward in ensuring the safety and well-being of inmates, specifically transgender and gender non-conforming inmates.

Transgender inmates are particularly vulnerable to mistreatment and abuse within correctional facilities. According to the 2015 Transgender Survey, nearly one-third of respondents who were incarcerated were physically and/or sexually assaulted by facility staff and/or another inmate in the past year.¹ This unacceptable reality paints a grim picture of the systemic failure to protect vulnerable individuals within our correctional system. These abuses, ranging from brutal beatings and denial of medical care to relentless verbal harassment and misgendering, take a devastating toll on the physical and mental well-being of transgender inmates.

A robust Correctional Ombudsman Unit, independent from the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, removes it from the direct influence of the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, guaranteeing objective investigations. The COU is crucial in addressing this crisis. Such a Unit can conduct thorough investigations, hold facilities accountable, and advocate for reforms that create safer environments for all inmates, especially those facing unique vulnerabilities like transgender individuals.

Accordingly, Annapolis Pride respectfully requests a **favorable** committee report on Senate Bill 134.

¹James, S. E., Herman, J. L., Rankin, S., Keisling, M., Mottet, L., & Anafi, M. (2016). The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey. Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality