



**Maryland Commission
on LGBTQIA+ Affairs**

**TESTIMONY OF JEREMY BROWNING
DIRECTOR, MARYLAND COMMISSION ON LGBTQIA+ AFFAIRS
FAVORABLE STATEMENT ON HB0297
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL - CORRECTIONAL OMBUDSMAN UNIT**

March 7, 2024

Judiciary Committee

The Hon. Luke Clippinger, Chair
The Hon. J. Sandy Bartlett, Vice Chair

Chair Clippinger, Vice-Chair Bartlett, and members of the Judiciary 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 297, which seeks to create an Correctional Ombudsman. This bill is a top priority for the Commission, which addresses critical issues within our correctional system and promotes justice, fairness, and equal treatment for all incarcerated individuals, including those within LGBTQIA+ communities.

LGBTQIA+ individuals, especially transgender, nonbinary, and intersex individuals, face unique challenges within the correctional system. Several Maryland based LGBTQIA+ advocacy organizations have reported receiving regular complaints from incarcerated, previously incarcerated individuals, or through family members and friends of incarcerated individuals. These complaints include lack of access to basic necessities, healthcare, and prescriptions; improper or unsafe housing; sexual assault; extended periods of solitary confinement; and fear of retaliation.

The Correctional Ombudsman Unit would provide a crucial mechanism to conduct independent investigations of complaints and conduct reviews within the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. Independent oversight ensures transparency, accountability, and protection against reprisals which is fundamental to safeguarding the rights and well-being of all incarcerated individuals.

For those reasons, the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs strongly urges a favorable report on House Bill 297.