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Health and Government Operations Committee
240 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Monday, January 27, 2025

HB0141 – TASK FORCE ON LONELINESS AND ISOLATION

Position: **FAVORABLE**

Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and Esteemed Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee:

My name is Ronnie L. Taylor, and I serve as the Community Advocacy Manager at FreeState Justice, a nonprofit organization dedicated to addressing legal and systemic inequities impacting Maryland’s LGBTQIA+ community. I am here today to testify in strong support of **House Bill 0141**, which seeks to establish the State Task Force on Loneliness and Isolation.

House Bill 0141 addresses the pervasive and growing issue of loneliness and isolation in our state by creating a task force to study these challenges and recommend actionable solutions. Loneliness and social isolation affect diverse populations, including seniors, veterans, students, and those with marginalized identities. For Maryland’s LGBTQIA+ community, the issue is particularly pronounced as stigma and discrimination often exacerbates feelings of isolation.

According to a 2022 study by the Trevor Project, 45% of LGBTQ youth in Maryland reported considering suicide in the past year due to feelings of rejection and loneliness. Additionally, SAGE USA found that 50% of LGBTQ seniors live alone, increasing their vulnerability to mental health challenges. **House Bill 0141**’s commitment to exploring the root causes and recommending inclusive solutions is critical to creating a more equitable Maryland.

House Bill 0141 includes the voices of individuals from diverse backgrounds and life experiences, ensuring the task force’s recommendations are well-informed and inclusive. Specifically:

1. **Representation Matters:** The inclusion of LGBTQIA+ youth, veterans, and urban and rural representatives guarantees that

FreeState Justice, Inc. is a social justice organization that works through direct legal services, legislative and policy advocacy, and community engagement to enable Marylanders across the spectrum of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer identities to be free to live authentically, with safety and dignity, in all communities throughout our state.

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marginalized voices are at the table, reflecting the diversity of those affected by loneliness.

2. **Comprehensive Approach:** The bill mandates the task force to evaluate causes, identify prevention methods, and recommend local solutions, providing a holistic framework to address this pressing issue.
3. **Potential Partnerships:** By involving representatives from organizations like ours, Maryland has the opportunity to leverage existing community programs—such as our Resource Navigation Program—to enhance accessibility to vital services like mental health counseling, harm reduction, and housing assistance.

Our Resource Navigation Program, for instance, works closely with Behavioral Health System Baltimore and the Maryland Recovery Network to connect individuals with inclusive treatment programs tailored to their unique needs. Programs like ours can serve as models for the task force’s recommendations, ensuring tangible impacts for those experiencing isolation.

Through our work at FreeState Justice, we have witnessed firsthand how social isolation disproportionately affects our LGBTQIA+ clients. **House Bill 0141** has the potential to expand access to these critical resources and replicate this impact statewide.

In closing, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report for **House Bill 0141**. By addressing loneliness and isolation through an inclusive and representative task force, Maryland has the opportunity to create a state where all residents, regardless of identity, have access to the social connections and resources they need to thrive. Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue.

Best,

Ronnie L. Taylor

Ronnie L. Taylor

Supporting Materials:

1. The Trevor Project 2022 National Survey: <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022>
2. SAGE USA Report on LGBTQ Seniors: <https://www.sageusa.org/resources>