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Richard Keith Kaplowitz
Frederick, MD 21703

TESTIMONY ON HB#/0696- POSITION: FAVORABLE

**State Boards, Committees, Commissions, Task Forces, and Workgroups - Elimination of
Citizenship Requirements and Establishment of Diversity Requirements**

TO: Chair Pena-Melnky, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of the Health and Government
Operations Committee

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB#/0696, **State Boards, Committees, Commissions, Task Forces, and Workgroups - Elimination of Citizenship Requirements and Establishment of Diversity Requirements**

There is an ongoing effort to suppress and eliminate DEI by persons who see it as a threat to white Christian male domination of our workplaces and our society. There is also ongoing demonization of immigrants whether they are or are not documented.

Among seven DEI experts and industry leaders CNN has interviewed, most had a shared vision for what constitutes the concept: ¹

- **Diversity** is embracing the differences everyone brings to the table, whether those are someone's race, age, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability or other aspects of social identity.
- **Equity** is treating everyone fairly and providing equal opportunities.
- **Inclusion** is respecting everyone's voice and creating a culture in which people from all backgrounds feel encouraged to express their ideas and perspectives.

DEI was created because marginalized communities have not always had equal opportunities for jobs or felt a sense of belonging in majority-White corporate settings, said Daniel Oppong, founder of The Courage Collective, a consultancy that advises companies on DEI.

"That is the genesis of why some of these programs exist," he said. **"It was an attempt to try to create workplaces where more or all people can thrive."**

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2025/01/22/us/dei-diversity-equity-inclusion-explained/index.html>

It now seems that DEI is a ethnocentric way of declaring that ONLY white Christian men are the top in all areas. It believes that any race or gender or nationality or immigration status is by definition “less than” because there is no way, even if they are qualified, that the qualification overcomes the white privilege being claimed. It also believes that all immigrants are automatically less than and should, despite any contributions they are making in their life in the United States, not have any role or say-so in any area that affects their life and community.

This bill makes the moral and ethical statement that my Jewish faith, in fact all Abrahamic faiths believe, that you do not do anything to others that are hateful to yourself. It centers the “love your neighbor as yourself” moral imperative as a governing philosophy to be applied to the mechanisms of government.

This bill will remind all of us that the commandments to care for the stranger are mentioned more times than *any* other commandment in the Torah — more even than the command to love God (*v'ahavta*). According to the Talmud, Rabbi Eliezer the Great noted that "the Torah warns 36 times, and some say 46 times, not to oppress the stranger" (Babylonian Talmud, *Bava M'tzia* 59b). The decree is articulated in a number of ways: "You shall not wrong nor oppress the stranger, for you were strangers in the Land of Egypt" (Exodus 22:20). "The strangers who reside with you shall be to you as your citizens... for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 19:34).²

In recognition of and respect for those strangers amongst us this bill will eliminate citizenship requirements for boards and commissions. It will make the moral and ethical policy effective for Maryland by requiring that members of boards, committees, commissions, task forces, and workgroups reflect the full diversity of the State to the extent practicable.

DEI does NOT mean you let anyone you see as less than you continue to be treated less, it says you center promotion of diversity, equity and inclusion in how you permit volunteers and staff to reflect and include the people living our communities.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB#/0696.

² [https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/torah-commentary/commandment-love-and-help-stranger#:~:text=The%20decree%20is%20articulated%20in,%22%20\(Leviticus%2019%3A34\)](https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/torah-commentary/commandment-love-and-help-stranger#:~:text=The%20decree%20is%20articulated%20in,%22%20(Leviticus%2019%3A34))