



**Maryland Commission
on LGBTQIA+ Affairs**

Bill Title: Human Relations - Protection of the Free Exercise of Religion

Bill Number(s): [HB1019](#)

Position: UNFAVORABLE

Date: February 25, 2025

Submitted by: Jeremy Browning, Director of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs

To:

House Health and Government Operations Committee

The Hon. Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk, Chair
The Hon. Bonnie Cullison, Vice Chair

Testimony on behalf of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs:

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs, created by the Maryland General Assembly, works to serve LGBTQIA+ Marylanders by galvanizing community voices, researching and addressing challenges, and advocating for policies that advance equity and inclusion. The Commission envisions a Maryland where all LGBTQIA+ people can live full and authentic lives. As a vital resource, the Commission collaborates with public officials, agencies, and community partners to ensure the rights and dignity of LGBTQIA+ Marylanders are protected and respected.

The Commission is in strong opposition to House Bill 1019. While the protection of religious liberty is a fundamental value enshrined in both the U.S. and Maryland Constitutions, HB1019 is not a neutral safeguard. It is a dangerous and unnecessary expansion that risks enabling discrimination under the guise of religious freedom. By prohibiting the government from “substantially burdening” a person’s exercise of religion, even through laws of general applicability, this bill mirrors provisions of the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which has been used to undermine non-discrimination protections across the country. Similar laws have been cited in cases where businesses and service providers sought to deny goods and services to LGBTQIA+ individuals, women, and religious minorities. Maryland has strong anti-discrimination laws, and HB1019 would create a broad exemption that weakens those protections.

This bill also allows individuals and organizations to file lawsuits claiming their religious beliefs have been burdened by existing laws or policies, inviting costly and unnecessary litigation

against the state and local governments. More importantly, it opens the door for harmful interpretations, including situations where employers may deny reproductive healthcare coverage or gender-affirming care to employees, businesses may refuse to serve LGBTQIA+ customers based on religious objections, government employees may refuse to issue marriage licenses, process benefits, or perform duties for same-sex couples or other disfavored groups, and shelters, foster care agencies, and healthcare providers may deny services to LGBTQIA+ individuals, unmarried parents, or people of different faiths.

Maryland's Constitution and existing laws already safeguard religious liberty. The standard proposed in HB1019 is unnecessary and goes beyond protecting religious practice. It creates a mechanism for undermining civil rights laws. This is not religious freedom; it is a license to discriminate. For these reasons, the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs urges an unfavorable report on HB1019. We stand for a Maryland where religious liberty and equal protection under the law coexist, rather than one where one right is used to diminish another.