



2601 N HOWARD ST  
BALTIMORE, MD 21218  
TEL 410) 625-LGBT (5428)  
FAX 410) 625-7423  
www.freestate-justice.org

Finance Committee  
3 East Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Monday, February 3, 2025**

SB0549 – Civil Actions - Immunity - Disclosure of Allegations of Sexually Assaultive Behavior (Stop Silencing Survivors Act)

Position: **FAVORABLE**

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Esteemed Members of the Judicial Proceedings 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 affecting Maryland's LGBTQ+ community. I am here to testify in strong support of **Senate Bill 0549**, the Stop Silencing Survivors Act.

**SB0549** addresses a critical issue: the fear of legal repercussions that silences survivors of sexually assaultive behavior. This fear is particularly pronounced within the LGBTQ+ community, where individuals already face heightened rates of sexual violence. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 44% of lesbian women and 61% of bisexual women experience rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime. For gay and bisexual men, the rates are 26% and 37%, respectively. Transgender individuals are also at significant risk, with 21% of transgender, genderqueer, and nonconforming college students reporting sexual assault.

Despite these alarming statistics, many LGBTQ+ survivors remain silent due to fear of retaliation or disbelief. **SB0549** seeks to empower these individuals by providing immunity from liability to those who, in good faith, disclose information about allegations of sexually assaultive behavior. This legal protection is crucial for fostering an environment where survivors feel safe to come forward, thereby promoting accountability and preventing further harm.

The bill establishes a presumption of good faith for individuals disclosing such information, which can only be rebutted by clear and convincing evidence of actual malice or intentional or reckless disclosure of false information. This

#### LEADERSHIP TEAM

Phillip Westry, Esq.  
**Executive Director**

Lauren Pruitt, Esq.  
**Legal Director**

#### BOARD

Lindsey Young  
**President**

Brianna January

Andrew Adelman, Esq.

Lee Carpenter, Esq.

Brenda Dorsch

Amanda Peskin

Bonnie Smith

Adam Farra

Diana Philip

Tina Jones

Miller Douglas

Lauren Fleming

Andrew Ansel

standard ensures that the legal system supports survivors while safeguarding against malicious or false accusations.

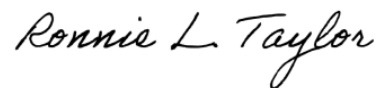
Furthermore, **SB0549** mandates the awarding of reasonable attorney fees and costs to individuals who successfully defend against claims challenging their good faith disclosures. This provision is essential for protecting individuals from financial burdens that could deter them from speaking out.

In Maryland, the LGBTQ+ community continues to face significant challenges related to sexual violence. A 2023 survey revealed that over 46% of transgender and gender-diverse individuals in the state have experienced physical violence or sexual assault in their lifetime.

By passing **SB0549**, Maryland can take a significant step toward supporting survivors and fostering a culture of openness and accountability. This legislation not only addresses a critical gap in protections but also reinforces Maryland's commitment to equity and inclusion.

In closing, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report for **SB0549**.

Best,



Ronnie L. Taylor

**Sources:**

1. [HRC | Understanding Intimate Partner Violence in the LGBTQ+ Community](#)
2. [HRC | HRC Report Shows that LGBTQ People are More Likely to be...](#)