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Judiciary Committee
100 Taylor House Office Building
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Friday, February 7, 2025

HB0677 – Criminal Procedure - Out of Court Statements - Vulnerable Adult Victims and Witnesses

Position: **FAVORABLE**

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and Esteemed Members of the Judiciary 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 LGBTQIA+ community. I am here to testify in strong support of **HB0677**, which seeks to authorize the admission of certain out-of-court statements made by vulnerable adult victims or witnesses in criminal proceedings.

HB0677 addresses a critical gap in our legal system concerning the admissibility of out-of-court statements by vulnerable adults. Vulnerable adults, including many within the LGBTQIA+ community, often face unique challenges that can impede their ability to testify in court. These challenges include cognitive impairments, physical disabilities, and the psychological impacts of trauma. By allowing certain out-of-court statements to be admitted as evidence, **HB0677** ensures that the voices of these individuals are heard, and justice is served.

The bill outlines specific criteria to ensure that only trustworthy statements are made. Courts are required to hold evaluation hearings to assess the trustworthiness of these statements, considering factors such as the victim's personal knowledge, the context of the statement, and any potential motives to fabricate. This rigorous process balances the need for justice with the rights of the accused.

For LGBTQIA+ individuals, particularly elders, the risk of abuse and neglect is significant. Studies have shown that LGBTQIA+ elders are more likely to be single, live alone, and lack traditional family support systems, increasing their vulnerability to abuse. According to SAGE, "LGBT[QIA+] Elders are twice as

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likely to be single and live alone; four times less likely to have children [who often serve as caregivers for their aging parents/guardians], and more likely to face poverty and homelessness; and to have poor physical and mental health."

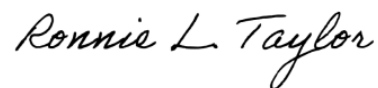
Furthermore, the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs has highlighted that "LGBT[QIA+] Elders are twice as likely to be single and live alone; four times less likely to have children [who often serve as caregivers for their aging parents/guardians], and more likely to face poverty and homelessness; and to have poor physical and mental health."

By facilitating the inclusion of their statements in court, **HB0677** provides a pathway to justice for these individuals, ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable.

In closing, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report for **HB0677**. This legislation not only addresses a critical gap in our legal system but also reinforces Maryland's commitment to protecting its most vulnerable residents, including those within the LGBTQIA+ community.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best,



Ronnie L. Taylor

Sources:

1. [Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs 2024 Policy Priorities](#)