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Judiciary Committee

100 Taylor House Office Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Tuesday, February 11, 2025

HB0613 – Criminal Procedure – Protection of Identity of Victim of Sexual Assault

Position: **FAVORABLE**

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and Esteemed Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Lauren Pruitt, and I am the Legal Director at FreeState Justice, a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving LGBTQ+ Marylanders from diverse backgrounds. I am writing in support of **HB0613**, which seeks to protect the identities of victims of sexual assault.

According to Bureau of Justice Statistics records, about 46% of victims of sexual assault reported the crime to the police in 2023. Many victims of sexual assault are hesitant to report the crime out of fear that their privacy will be violated. **HB0613** addresses this fear by requiring the redaction of identifying information from court documents involving victims of sexual assault when filings are to be shared with a nonparty.

This issue is especially relevant to the LGBTQ+ community, as research indicates such individuals are nearly four times more likely to experience violent victimization, including sexual assault, than non-LGBTQ+ individuals. Such rates are exacerbated when taking into account additional factors affecting LGBTQ+ individuals, such as race, immigration status, homelessness, and poverty.

Per the National Coalition for the Homeless, homeless LGBTQ+ youth are approximately 7.4 times more likely to experience sexual violence than heterosexual homeless youth. The Trevor Project additionally reports higher rates of sexual violence experienced by LGBTQ+ youth who face economic hardship, LGBTQ+ youth of color, and transgender and nonbinary individuals. The 2023 Maryland Trans Survey revealed concerning rates of violence and victimization experienced by transgender individuals, with 46.1% of respondents reporting having experienced physical and/or sexual assault at least once in their life, and 23.3% having experienced this three or more times.

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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.

This bill is essential to address the lack of privacy afforded to victims of sexual assault and to ensure they may feel secure that their identifying information will remain confidential. With the security of their identities not being leaked, victims of sexual assault may feel more empowered to seek justice for the assault in the courtroom.

As an advocate, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges that experiencing sexual assault and reporting it impose on the LGBTQ+ community. Fear of personal information, such as sexual orientation, gender identity, and details of the assault, being shared keeps many from reporting sexual assault and seeking support. By protecting all victims of sexual assault, Maryland will ensure a safeguard for the LGBTQ+ community as well.

I urge the committee to issue a favorable report for **HB0613**. By taking the step to protect the identity of victims of sexual assault, not only may more victims come forward and report the crime they have experienced, but they will be able to do so without fear of being identified by others.

Sincerely,

Lauren Pruitt
Legal Director
FreeState Justice

Sources:

1. Criminal Victimization, 2023, <https://bjs.ojp.gov/document/cv23.pdf>
2. Homelessness Among the LGBTQ Community, <https://nationalhomeless.org/lgbtq-homelessness/>
3. LGBT people nearly four times more likely than non-LGBT people to be victims of violent crime, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/press/ncvs-lgbt-violence-press-release/>
4. Research Findings, <https://transmaryland.org/findings>
5. Sexual Violence and Suicide Risk among LGBTQ+ Young People, <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/sexual-violence-and-suicide-risk-among-lgbtq-young-people/>