



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

Judiciary Committee
100 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Friday, March 7, 2025

HB1452 – Hate Crimes and Hate Bias - Definitions of Sexual Orientation and Hate Bias Incident

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 Advocacy, Policy, & Partnerships Director 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 **House Bill 1452**, titled "Hate Crimes and Hate Bias – Definitions of Sexual Orientation and Hate Bias Incident."

HB1452 seeks to amend the current legal definitions related to hate crimes in Maryland by:

1. **Updating the Definition of "Sexual Orientation"**: The bill proposes redefining "sexual orientation" to encompass an individual's identity, or another's perception thereof, concerning the gender or genders to which the individual is sexually or emotionally attracted. This clarification explicitly distinguishes sexual orientation from gender identity.
2. **Introducing "Hate Bias Incident"**: The bill defines a "hate bias incident" as an act of hostility or aggression directed at individuals or groups based on their actual or perceived protected class status, which does not constitute a crime under State or federal law.

These amendments aim to enhance the accuracy and comprehensiveness of hate crime reporting and address the nuanced realities of bias-motivated incidents, thereby fostering a more inclusive and just society.

Explanation of Support:

1. **Enhanced Legal Clarity and Protection:**

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.

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Phillip Westry, Esq.

Executive Director

Lauren Pruitt, Esq.

Legal Director

Ronnie L. Taylor

Advocacy, Policy, & Partnerships Director

BOARD

Lindsey Young

President

Andrew Adelman, Esq.

Vice President

Miller Douglas

Treasurer

Lauren Fleming, Esq.

Secretary

Adam Farra

Andrew Ansel

Bonnie Smith

Brenda Dorsch

Diana Philip

Lee Carpenter, Esq.

- *Redefining "Sexual Orientation"*: The current definition may not fully capture the spectrum of sexual orientations, potentially leading to underreporting or misclassification of hate crimes. The proposed definition aligns with contemporary understandings and ensures that all individuals, regardless of how others perceive their sexual orientation, receive appropriate legal protection.
- *Defining "Hate Bias Incident"*: By recognizing non-criminal acts of bias, such as slurs or the distribution of offensive materials, the bill acknowledges the broader spectrum of prejudice that communities face. This recognition is crucial for understanding and addressing the full scope of bias-motivated behaviors.

2. **Improved Data Collection and Resource Allocation:**

- Accurate definitions enable law enforcement agencies to collect more precise data on hate crimes and bias incidents. This data is vital for developing targeted interventions, allocating resources effectively, and crafting informed policies to combat hate-driven behaviors.

3. **Alignment with Federal Standards:**

- The bill brings Maryland's definitions in line with federal standards, such as those established by the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which expanded hate crime definitions to include sexual orientation and gender identity. This alignment facilitates better coordination between state and federal agencies in addressing hate crimes.

At FreeState Justice, we have witnessed firsthand the detrimental impact of bias-motivated incidents on Maryland's LGBTQIA+ community. Individuals have reported experiences ranging from verbal harassment to threats, which, while not always criminal, significantly affect their sense of safety and well-being. Recognizing and documenting these incidents are essential steps toward fostering an environment where all Marylanders can live without fear of prejudice.

In closing, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report for **HB1452**. This legislation not only clarifies and strengthens our hate crime statutes but also demonstrates Maryland's commitment to protecting all its residents from bias-motivated harm. By enacting **HB1452**, we take a significant step toward ensuring justice and equity for marginalized communities across our state.

Best,

Ronnie L. Taylor

Ronnie L. Taylor

Sources:

1. [Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act - Wikipedia](#)
2. [Violence against LGBTQ people - Wikipedia](#)
3. [Violence against transgender people - Wikipedia](#)
4. [Hate crimes, particularly against LGBTQ community, on the rise: FBI data | WBAL Baltimore News](#)
5. [HRC | New FBI Data: Anti-LGBTQ+ Hate Crimes Continue to Spike](#)