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To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in support of the passage of SB 626. My support for this bill is both as a lifetime resident of Maryland and as a licensed clinical social worker with 20 years of experience providing psychotherapy and casework services to Marylanders, including child, adolescent, adult and senior members of the LGBTQ community.

While our society has taken important steps toward recognizing and respecting the legitimacy and rights of lesbian, gay and bisexual Americans, we have not made adequate progress toward recognizing and respecting the legitimacy and rights of transgender citizens. Maryland has been a state in which transgender citizens have found some relative safety, however this tenuous safety is currently under tremendous threat from the Trump administration and its allied state and local politicians as it attempts to force our nation to accept that our transgender family members, friends, coworkers, and leaders do not in fact exist. To see our transgender fellow citizens as psychologically unwell and a threat to our society.

As a licensed mental health clinician, I can attest to the fact that being transgender is not pathological or a sign of mental illness, but is rather an experience of disconnection between the body into which one was born and one's experience and understanding of oneself as a human being. This disconnect is a psychologically and emotionally painful experience, but it is one that is eased when one can safely present oneself to society at large as the person they experience and understand themselves to be.

To walk into the world as a trans person can be emotionally, psychologically, and physically dangerous, and it requires bravery and resilience to continue to do so day after day when one is exposed to demeaning, aggressive, and dehumanizing treatment from some fellow citizens. While the Maryland legislature cannot force all Marylanders to treat trans Marylanders with respect, dignity and humanity, the legislature can take steps to ensure that the state itself does not engage in that discrimination. SB 626 is an important step in this process, since it will lessen the likelihood that trans Marylanders will face ridicule, denial of service, or threats to physical safety in the community when required to present legal documents as their trans identity remains private. Please respect and protect our fellow trans Marylanders by passing this bill.

Sincerely,

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