SB604 Favorable 2026.pdf
Uploaded by: Debi Jasen
Position: FAV

Judicial Proceedings Committee
Senate Bill 604
Favorable

Honorable Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee;

Can you believe that we actually need this legislation? Do you remember thinking that the world would be a better place in 2026? This timeline is so depressing. I mean, there are actually people who will argue against this bill because they think that God wants them to hate and to hurt children!

Senate Bill 604 would prevent adoption and foster agencies from acting in bigoted, hateful ways. I'd like to request that there be something prohibiting someone from fostering or adopting a child if they wouldn't love and accept that child (such as a racist with a Black child or a Queerphobe with a trans child.) But I'll support Senate Bill 604 even if you don't amend it to add that. Please give Senate Bill 604 a favorable report. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Debi Jasen
Pasadena, MD

SB604
Uploaded by: Kris Fair
Position: FAV

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LETTER OF SUPPORT
SENATE BILL 0604

February 25, 2026

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the LGBTQ+ Caucus, we are writing to express our support of **SB0604: Adoption, Foster Care, and Public Services - Prohibition Against Discrimination**. As advocates for the LGBTQ+ community in the General Assembly, we believe this bill will protect, strengthen, and secure rights for all LGBTQ+ residents. The benefits and effects of passing the proposed legislation will create a positive and long-lasting change for all of Maryland.

SB0604 would prohibit a child placement agency from denying a prospective parent's application to adopt a child based on certain characteristics, with certain exceptions. The bill would also prohibit the Social Services Administration of the Department of Human Services and certain agencies, institutions, and facilities from discriminating against a foster parent, a prospective foster parent, or a child in foster care based on certain characteristics. The LGBTQ+ community has historically faced barriers in adoption and foster care, including agencies that may refuse to place children with them because of sexual orientation or gender identity. This bill will help solidify equal access to adoption and foster care, protect LGBTQ+ youth from discrimination in child welfare systems, and ensure nondiscrimination protections in state-supported services and employment. Codifying these prohibitions strengthens protections and lowers ambiguity, helping make Maryland's systems more inclusive and equitable for LGBTQ+ individuals and families.

Thank you for considering the bill's positive effects on the LGBTQ+ community. Please reach out to us regarding any additional questions or concerns on the bill. We appreciate your efforts in fostering community and furthering rights for all Marylanders.
Respectfully,

Delegate Kris Fair
Chair

306 House Office Building, 6 Bladen Street, Annapolis, MD 21401

2026 SB0604 FAV.pdf
Uploaded by: Mathew Goldstein
Position: FAV

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February 18 2026

SB 0604 - FAV

Adoption, Foster Care, and Public Services - Prohibition Against Discrimination

Dear Chair William C. Smith, Jr., Vice Chair Jeff Waldstreicher, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

Invidious discrimination hurts us as a society, it divides people and impedes people from realizing their potential. The government sector in particular has a responsibility to not participate in, or otherwise facilitate, invidious discrimination. There should be no exception for government provided human services. This bill requiring state human services and the recipients of state human service funding to uphold non-discrimination standards is welcome. Secular Maryland recommends this bill for approval by the General Assembly.

Too often people who are unlike ourselves are seen as threatening, triggering misdirected fear. Minorities can be vulnerable to negative stereotyping. Some theists deem non-theism to be peculiar, unreasonable, or threatening. They misunderstand non-theism and may associate non-theism with negative behavior. The metaphysical naturalism underlying non-theism is an intellectual conclusion that nontheists (deists, agnostics, atheists) sincerely consider to be more compelling than the competing conclusions.

Mathew Goldstein

3838 Early Glow Ln

Bowie, MD

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SB0604 CPMC FAVA JPR.pdf
Uploaded by: Diana Philip
Position: FWA

THE COALITION TO PROTECT MARYLAND'S CHILDREN

Our Mission: To combine and amplify the power of organizations and citizens working together to keep children safe from abuse and neglect. We strive to secure budgetary and public policy resources to make meaningful and measurable improvements in safety, permanence, and wellbeing.

SB0604 - Adoption, Foster Care, and Public Services - Prohibition Against Discrimination
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 18, 2026

Position: SUPPORT with amendment

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children is a consortium of organizations and individuals formed in 1992 who are concerned about the care of Maryland's most vulnerable children and work together to educate and promote meaningful child welfare reform. **CPMC urges a favorable report with one amendment on HB0604** - *Adoption, Foster Care, and Public Services - Prohibition Against Discrimination*.

Our coalition is aware of directives and policies stemming from the current federal administration that may risk discriminating against a foster parent, a potential foster caregiver, a prospective adoptive parent, a foster child, or a child seeking to be adopted across various factors. We appreciate seeing this legislation in order to have Maryland remain a safe haven for families and individuals who may be subject to contemporary forms of heightened discrimination and encourage more individuals to open their doors to vulnerable children seeking temporary respite or permanent homes.

We respectfully request an amendment pertaining to page 3 of the bill listing reasons why a child placement agency shall deny an application. Line 17 states "HAD A PREVIOUS APPLICATION DENIED FOR A VALID REASON". CPMC recommends that this line be struck from the bill as presented. It is essential to preserve appropriate discretion for child placement agencies, by allowing a full evaluation of whether placement is appropriate based on current circumstances while promoting permanency opportunities for children and second chances for families. A prior denial, even for a valid reason, does not necessarily reflect an applicant's current fitness to adopt or foster. Circumstances change. Individuals remediate deficiencies, complete treatment, improve financial stability, resolve housing issues, or otherwise address prior concerns. A mandatory denial removes the agency's ability to assess whether those prior concerns remain relevant to the best interests of the child.

Child welfare decisions are inherently individualized and fact-specific. Agencies must retain the flexibility to evaluate each applicant based on current conditions, updated evidence, and demonstrated rehabilitation or growth. Most importantly, decisions in adoption and foster care must not be guided by rigid procedures that may unintentionally reduce the pool of safe, qualified families. It is for these reasons that the Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children **urges a favorable report with amendment on HB0604** - *Adoption, Foster Care, and Public Services - Prohibition Against Discrimination.*[1]

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[1] Members of CPMC represented by this written testimony include Child Justice, Center for Hope, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA- Maryland), Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA - Baltimore County), Maryland Chapter - American Academy of Pediatrics, Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY), Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV), and the National Association of Social Workers – MD (NASW)

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children 1014 W 36th Street, Suite 103, Baltimore, MD 21211
www.protectmarylandschildren.org admin@protectmarylandschildren.org

Maryland Catholic Conference_SB 604_UNFAV.pdf
Uploaded by: Jenny Kraska
Position: UNF

MARYLAND CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

February 18, 2026

SB 604
Adoption, Foster Care, and Public Services – Prohibition Against Discrimination

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Position: Unfavorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) offers testimony in opposition to **Senate Bill 604**. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

The Maryland Catholic Conference respectfully **opposes SB 604** because, as drafted, it would (1) prohibit child placement agencies from considering sincerely held religious convictions in adoption and foster care decisions, and (2) broadly forbid governmental bodies and contractors from declining to work with faith-based providers when their religious beliefs inform how they serve children and families.

Our concern is not about preventing loving adults from becoming parents—far from it. Rather, it is about preserving *religious freedom*, *pluralism*, and *the participation of faith-based ministries* in the public foster and adoption system.

The Supreme Court in *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia* Affirmed Religious Freedom Protection for Faith-Based Agencies
In *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, where the Supreme Court of the United States ruled a similar Pennsylvania policy, to that put forth by this legislation, blatantly unconstitutional. The United States Supreme Court unanimously held that the City of Philadelphia **violated the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment** by refusing to contract with Catholic Social Services (CSS) unless it agreed to certify same-sex couples as foster parents.
The decision emphasized that:

- CSS's religious beliefs about marriage and family *do not harm others*, and its participation in the foster system did not prevent the City from placing children with same-sex couples through other agencies.

- The government violated constitutional protections by effectively forcing a religious organization to choose between following its faith and serving children.

The Court recognized that allowing faith-based agencies to operate consistent with their beliefs *does not deny opportunities to families who qualify under state law*—other agencies in Philadelphia continued to serve same-sex couples.

This decision underscores that religious organizations—are *not unqualified or unneeded* in child welfare systems simply because they bring a religious perspective to their work.

The Proposed Bill Would Infringe on Religious Freedom Without Advancing Child Welfare

While the bill's stated goal is to prohibit "discrimination" in foster care and adoption placement, it could, in application, force religious agencies to act contrary to their belief about the nature of marriage and family—even at the cost of shutting them out of the system entirely. Faith-based agencies do not seek to impose their beliefs on others; they seek to operate within a pluralistic society that respects both religious convictions and civil equality.

Religious Freedom and Civil Rights Can Coexist

Contrary to the notion that religious freedom and nondiscrimination are incompatible, *Fulton* demonstrates that the Constitution protects *both*—and that religious belief should not automatically bar a ministry from serving in the public square.

For these reasons, the Maryland Catholic Conference respectfully urges the Committee to issue an **unfavorable report** on SB 604.

2026_02_18 SB 604 Prohibition Against Discriminati

Uploaded by: Tiffany Clark

Position: INFO

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CHRISTIAN E. BARRERA
Chief of Staff

February 18, 2026

TO: The Honorable William Smith
Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Tiffany Clark
Director, Legislative Affairs, Office of the Attorney General

RE: Senate Bill 604 – Adoption, Foster Care, and Public Services - Prohibition Against Discrimination (Support in Concept)

The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) supports in concept Senate Bill 604 – Adoption, Foster Care, and Public Services - Prohibition Against Discrimination. Senate Bill 604 would prohibit discrimination by local departments of social services, private child placement agencies, and service providers based on certain characteristics when considering prospective foster and adoptive parents, working with youth in foster care, or in delivering public services.

This legislation would codify some existing practices to ensure more consistency in how Maryland children and families are treated. Senate Bill 604 would add gender identity to the list of prohibited bases for discriminating against an applicant to a private child placement agency seeking to become a foster or adoptive parent. The bill would prohibit discrimination due to gender identity, sexual orientation, or marital status by local departments of social services or the Social Services Administration in working with prospective foster parents, current foster and adoptive parents, or youth in foster care. Senate Bill 604 also would add gender identity to the list of characteristics that may not be the basis for discrimination in employment or service delivery by any local department of social services, the Department of Human Services, or related state contractors.

This bill addresses two of our most important values - Marylanders' access to fair and equitable systems and promoting permanent families for our children. By removing undue obstacles for people to become parents and children to have families, this bill promotes a more

diverse and inclusive society for the benefit of us all. In our view, this bill creates an important safeguard for civil rights protections and ensures that the State consistently implements the principles that we value.

We appreciate the General Assembly's work on this and welcome the opportunity to share our perspective.

Cc: Members of the Committee