



**Maryland Commission  
on LGBTQIA+ Affairs**

**Bill Title:** Hate Crimes and Hate Bias - Definitions of Sexual Orientation and Hate Bias Incident

**Bill Number(s):** HB0513

**Position:** FAVORABLE

**Date:** February 6, 2026

**Submitted by:** Director Jeremy Browning on behalf of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs

---

**To:**

**House Judiciary Committee**

The Hon. J. Sandy Bartlett, Chair  
The Hon. Debra Davis, Vice Chair

**Testimony on Behalf of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs**

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs, created by the Maryland General Assembly, works to serve LGBTQIA+ Marylanders by galvanizing community voices, researching and addressing challenges, and advocating for policies that advance equity and inclusion. The Commission envisions a Maryland where all LGBTQIA+ people can live full and authentic lives. As a vital resource, the Commission collaborates with public officials, agencies, and community partners to ensure the rights and dignity of LGBTQIA+ Marylanders are protected and respected.

The Commission strongly supports HB0513, which clarifies and strengthens the definitions of sexual orientation and hate bias incident within Maryland's hate crime statutes. This bill is a necessary step in ensuring that Maryland law reflects the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals and other marginalized communities targeted by hate.

HB0513 modernizes the definition of sexual orientation in Maryland law to better reflect the diversity of identities within the LGBTQIA+ community. The bill defines sexual orientation as an individual's identity, or another's perception of an individual's identity, in relation to the gender or genders to which the individual is sexually or emotionally attracted. By updating the definition, this legislation aligns legal language with contemporary understandings of sexual orientation, ensuring that all individuals receive equal protection under the law regardless of how others perceive their identity. It also clarifies that sexual orientation is distinct from gender identity, preventing misinterpretations that could limit protections for LGBTQIA+ Marylanders.

In addition to refining the definition of sexual orientation, HB0513 establishes a clear legal framework for identifying and addressing hate bias incidents, which are acts of hostility or aggression motivated by bias but do not rise to the level of a crime. Hate bias incidents, including slurs, threats, and the distribution of hateful materials, create real harm and fear in

communities. By requiring the Maryland State Police to collect and analyze data on these incidents, this legislation will provide critical information to better understand patterns of bias and discrimination. It also empowers Maryland to take proactive steps in addressing and preventing escalating hate-fueled behavior before it leads to more severe harm.

The need for clearer definitions and improved data collection is reinforced by preliminary findings from the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs' statewide Community Needs Assessment, which will be published in a forthcoming report. Nearly 27% of respondents reported experiencing a hate crime while living in Maryland. Verbal assault was the most commonly reported incident, followed by vandalism and sexual assault. Many of these incidents go unreported, highlighting persistent gaps in trust, access to reporting mechanisms, and victim support. These findings underscore the importance of accurately defining and tracking hate crimes and hate bias incidents to inform prevention, response, and survivor support efforts statewide.

LGBTQIA+ Marylanders, alongside other marginalized groups, continue to experience bias-motivated harassment and violence. According to the most recent data, hate crimes and hate bias incidents targeting LGBTQIA+ individuals remain prevalent across the state. By strengthening these definitions, HB0513 ensures that Maryland law provides the necessary tools to track, address, and prevent acts of hate, making our state safer and more inclusive for all.

For these reasons, the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs urges a favorable report on HB0513.