

Testimony in Support of HB513

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

FAVORABLE

February 6, 2026

The Honorable Delegate J. Sandy Bartlett, Chair; Delegate Debra Davis, Vice Chair; and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am writing to ask you to vote in favor of HB513. As a person concerned with the safety and well-being of transgender and non-binary individuals, I support this bill's update of the definition of "sexual orientation" within state hate crime statutes to better align with current understanding. I also support the bill's amendment to the definition of "hate bias incident" so that informational reporting of incidents involving protected classes of individuals is better identified and effectively addressed by State Police.

Maryland's present definition of "sexual orientation" in laws against hate crimes and hate bias incidents is outdated and conflates the concepts of gender identity with sexual or emotional attraction to a certain gender or genders. This bill would define the term to distinguish between sexual orientation and gender identity, and would better reflect the diversity of identities within the LGBTQIA+ community. This ensures that all individuals receive equal protection under the law without regard to how others view them.

Hate bias incidents, including slurs, name-calling, and insults, and the display, posting, or electronic distribution of offensive language and symbols, are extremely harmful to LGBTQIA+ individuals and other marginalized communities targeted by hate. Improving the definitions in the statute and enhancing data reporting in this area will assist in identifying patterns of bias and discrimination, which will lead to preventing more serious hate crimes.

For these reasons, I ask for a favorable report on HB513.

Respectfully Submitted,

Melinda Littell

Arnold, D33C