



Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 513
Hate Crimes and Hate Bias - Definitions of Sexual Orientation and Hate Bias
Incident
House Judiciary Committee
February 10, 2026

Dear Honorable Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the Committee,

CASA supports House Bill 513. CASA supports the passage of HB 513 because it updates Maryland law to reflect current understandings and definitions of sexual orientation and gender identity.

With a membership of over 173,000 members, CASA creates change with its power-building model blending human services, community organizing, and advocacy to serve the full spectrum of the needs, dreams, and aspirations of members. For nearly forty years, CASA has employed grassroots community organizing to bring our communities closer together and fight for justice, while simultaneously providing vital services to communities across the state and beyond.

1. CASA members face intersecting forms of harm.

Many of the people we serve at CASA live at the intersection of multiple identities: they are immigrants, people of color, low-income workers, and also queer. Queer immigrants in particular face unique and compounding risks. They are disproportionately targeted for harassment and violence because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, while also facing language barriers, economic insecurity. Many came to Maryland to escape persecution for these very traits and identities in their home countries. Passing HB 513 is an important step toward recognizing and responding to these lived experiences.

2. Updating Maryland Law to Current Understandings of Identity is Critical

As understandings of gender and sexual identity have developed, both in that they are better understood and that they are more politically salient, it is important to update state law that is already intended to protect people from being targeted and victimized by hateful and discriminatory acts. The current definition of sexual orientation is

narrow and excludes broad swaths of the LBGTQ+ community, and ignores the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity. Considering the increase in politicization of trans rights and issues, it is imperative that Maryland maintain a clear and inclusive stance in its law and policy to protect all Marylanders' freedom to live full and engaged lives, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identities.

3. Gathering Information About Hate Bias Incidents Helps Direct Lawmakers Toward Good Policy

HB 513 establishes a process for the state of Maryland to catalogue incidents of hate speech, which is a necessary first step if the state is to take action to remedy or prevent such activity. The Attorney General has noted that reporting is sparse, and this bill is meant to bring clarity to law enforcement about what it is that they are required to report.

For immigrant communities, underreporting is especially severe. At CASA, we see firsthand how victims fear retaliation, deportation, or being dismissed or ignored by government agencies. Incidents precisely like those described in HB 513 harm our members and should be recorded and recognized by law enforcement. Currently, there is uncertainty about whether law enforcement should take note of someone hurling slurs or posting hateful messages because of where someone is from, how they identify themselves, or who they love. By clarifying what constitutes a hate bias incident and what law enforcement is expected to collect, HB 513 helps build trust and accountability.

Collecting this information alone will not solve the problems our queer community faces, but it will be a positive step toward understanding patterns of harm and ensuring that the state's attention and resources are directed where they are needed most, supported by accurate information.

CASA Policy Team

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