

EZRA MACLEOD TOWNE

Testimony Favorable to HB0513: Hate Crimes and Hate Bias – Definitions of Sexual Orientation and Hate Bias Incident

February 6, 2026

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

My name is Ezra Towne, and my pronouns are they/them. I am writing to you today because **I strongly support HB0513, and ask for a favorable report from the Judiciary committee.**

As a transgender person, I am intensely concerned when bills contain confusing or outdated language around sexual orientating and gender identity. Maryland hate bias incident law does just that.

HB0513 is a simple bill, meant to clarify that sexual orientation and gender identity should not be conflated towards the beginning of the bill, and to further detail what counts as a hate bias incident.

Protected classes would now include both sexual orientation and gender identity and would alter current criminal law to read:

(d) (1) “Sexual orientation” means [the identification of an individual as to male or female homosexuality, heterosexuality, or bisexuality]

(1) 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.

(2) “SEXUAL ORIENTATION” DOES NOT MEAN GENDER IDENTITY.

The bill also delineates what types of crimes count as a hate bias incident to include those that are directed at an individual or group, that may involve public and private property, includes slurs, name-calling, and insults, and the display, posting, or electronic distribution of offensive language and symbols.

I firmly believe that this language represents the intent of the law as it currently exists and appropriately modernizes Maryland law on hate bias incidents - which are critical to protecting all Marylanders.

For these reasons, **I ask for a favorable report on HB0513 - Hate Crimes and Hate Bias - Definitions of Sexual Orientation and Hate Bias Incident.**

Sincerely,
Ezra MacLeod Towne
Wheaton, D18