

BILL NO: House Bill 0513
TITLE: Hate Crimes and Hate Bias – Definitions of Sexual Orientation and Hate Bias Incident
COMMITTEE: Judiciary
HEARING DATE: February 10, 2026
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Women’s Law Center of Maryland is a nonprofit legal organization dedicated to protecting the physical safety, economic security, and civil rights of women and their families across Maryland through legal services, policy advocacy, and education. We support House Bill 513 because it addresses significant gaps in Maryland’s hate crimes laws by clarifying key definitions and ensuring that protections reflect the lived realities of Marylanders.

House Bill 513 updates the definition of sexual orientation in Maryland’s hate crimes statutes and clarifies the definition of hate bias incidents. These changes will provide much-needed clarity to law enforcement and the public regarding existing reporting requirements and ensure that Maryland law more accurately reflects a broad range of identities. While the Maryland State Police have collected reports of hate bias incidents since at least 1987, there is currently no definition of a “hate bias incident” in Maryland Public Safety Code § 2-307(b). Instead, the statute requires law enforcement to report incidents “apparently directed against an individual or group” based on certain protected characteristics, without further guidance. This lack of definition creates confusion and inconsistency in how incidents are identified, reported, and addressed, contributing to underreporting and uneven implementation of the law.

HB 513 also updates the definition of sexual orientation in Maryland Criminal Law Code § 10-301. The current definition relies on a limited list of examples—such as homosexuality, heterosexuality, and bisexuality—and excludes many sexual orientations, including asexual and pansexual identities. It also fails to account for intersex and nonbinary individuals who may not fall within “male or female” categorizations. By replacing this narrow list with a clear and inclusive definition, HB 513 modernizes the statute to reflect current understandings of sexual orientation and recognizes that language and identity evolve over time. Without these updates, some Marylanders remain unprotected under our hate crimes laws.

By providing clearer definitions of hate bias incidents and sexual orientation, HB 513 will make Maryland’s hate crimes statutes easier to understand and comply with, reduce inconsistencies in enforcement, and better protect all Marylanders. For these reasons, the Women’s Law Center of Maryland urges a favorable report on House Bill 513.