



**Maryland Safe Haven**  
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Iya Dammons, Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer

Good afternoon, Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee,

My name is **Alexis Newby**, and I serve as the Chief Operating Officer of **Maryland Safe Haven**, an organization committed to protecting, affirming, and stabilizing LGBTQ+ youth and adults across our state. I am here to offer strong support for **House Bill 1209 – Conversion Therapy: Prohibitions and Causes of Action**.

At Maryland Safe Haven, we serve young people who have experienced homelessness, family rejection, trauma, and exploitation. A distressing number of those youth share a common thread: they were subjected to so-called “conversion therapy” — practices that attempt to change their sexual orientation or gender identity. What we see on the ground aligns with the overwhelming medical and scientific consensus: these practices do not work, and they cause profound harm.

HB 1209 is rooted in established medical consensus. Organizations such as the American Psychological Association, American Psychiatric Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Medical Association, and the National Association of Social Workers have all concluded that efforts to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity are ineffective and harmful. These are not advocacy groups — they are the leading authorities in medicine, psychology, and behavioral health.

We witness the consequences of this harm every day: depression, anxiety, suicidality, substance use, chronic shame, internalized stigma, and spiritual trauma. Many survivors do not even recognize what was done to them as abuse until years — sometimes decades — later. They trusted a provider. They trusted a counselor. They trusted an adult in authority. That trust was weaponized.

HB 1209 addresses this reality in several critical ways.

First, it clarifies that psychological injury from conversion therapy is medical malpractice. This matters. For too long, survivors have struggled to seek redress because their harm was minimized as “belief” or “counseling preference.” This bill recognizes the injury as real and legally cognizable.

Second, it removes the cap on noneconomic damages in cases of conversion therapy–related malpractice. When we are talking about lifelong psychological harm, caps that were designed for traditional malpractice cases do not adequately reflect the depth and duration of trauma.

Third, it extends the statute of limitations. If the therapy occurred while the individual was a minor, they may file at any time. If it occurred while they were an adult, they have 20 years after their last session. This acknowledges the delayed manifestation of harm — something clearly documented in psychological literature and reflected in the bill’s preamble.



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Fourth, it establishes criminal penalties for those who provide conversion therapy for compensation or advertise it as effective. When a practice is scientifically discredited and demonstrably harmful, profiting from it should not be protected conduct.

Finally, the bill creates a 35% professional liability insurance surcharge and a Conversion Therapy Surcharge Fund to reimburse successful plaintiffs. This ensures that survivors are not re-traumatized by bearing the financial burden of seeking justice.

This legislation is not about restricting affirming care. The bill explicitly protects practices that provide acceptance, support, identity exploration, and coping skills. It does not prohibit conversations; it prohibits predetermined efforts to change who someone is.

As COO of Maryland Safe Haven, I have sat across from young people who believed they were broken because an adult told them so. I have heard survivors describe years of shame, secrecy, and self-blame. We cannot legislate away trauma that has already occurred — but we can prevent future harm and provide a path to accountability.

House Bill 1209 affirms that LGBTQ+ people deserve the same standard of evidence-based care as anyone else. It affirms that psychological injury is real. And it affirms that when harm occurs, survivors deserve justice.

On behalf of Maryland Safe Haven and the vulnerable communities we serve, I respectfully urge a favorable report on House Bill 1209.

Thank you for your time and consideration.