



Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs

Meeting Minutes
February 10, 2025
6:00 PM - 8:00 PM
Zoom Virtual Meeting

Commissioners Present:

Lee Blinder, Chair
M Pease, Vice Chair
Ali K.C. Bell
Joan Bryan
Josie Caballero
Mickey Dhir
Kurt Doan
Debb Dunn
Anthony Fox

Tina Jones
Stephen Martin
Paula Neira
Wendy Novak
Brandon Russell
Sarah Stern
Joe Toolan
Kijana West
Ly Xīnzhèn Zhǎngsūn

Commissioners Not Present:

Nicole Hollywood
Asher Kennedy

Staff Present:

Jeremy Browning, Director, Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs
Taylor Harer, Special Assistant, Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs
Krystal Quinlan, Assistant Attorney General

Guests Present:

Charlotte Persephone Hoffman, Policy Committee Advisor
Jonathan Smith, Office of the Attorney General - Chief, Civil Rights Division
Patrick Sawyer, DSCI - Manager of Partnerships and Recruitment
Jax King, DSCI, Data Associate
J Lisak, DSCI, Maryland Corps Member
Valerie Pasquale, BaltCo DHHS - Workplace Advocacy Coordinator

- I. Call to Order: The meeting was called to Order by Chair Blinder at 6:02 PM. Housekeeping and Meeting Guidelines were read and acknowledged. Additionally, meeting attendees were reminded to add their pronouns to their Zoom names and instructions were provided.

- II. Roll Call: Roll call was conducted by Chair Blinder and they provided a review of the voting procedures using the Zoom reaction functions to indicate vote (green "check" to indicate "yea" and the red "X" to indicate "nay" and no action to abstain).
- III. Agenda Approval: Chair Blinder presented the agenda for the meeting. Commissioner Bell made a motion to approve the agenda and was seconded by Commissioner Russell. The agenda was approved, with all in favor
- IV. Guest Speakers:
 - Patrick Sawyer, manager of partnerships and recruitment for the Department of Service and Civic Innovation introduced himself and explained that he was standing in for Secretary Montero, who was unable to attend due to a scheduling conflict. Patrick provided an overview of the department's flagship program, the Maryland Core Service Year Option, which was launched by Governor Moore. The program targets recent high school graduates (within the last three years) and offers them a paid, 9-month opportunity to develop skills and gain experience. Participants are paired with employers in industries of their choice, where they receive mentorship, professional development, and apprenticeship credentials. Additionally, they earn a \$6,000 completion award upon finishing the program. This initiative benefits both the young participants, who gain valuable experience and skills, and employers, who have access to a pipeline of motivated, talented workers. Patrick then introduced J Lisack, a program participant, to share their personal experience with the program.
 - J Lisack, a member of the Maryland Corps, shared their gratitude for the program, which has helped them grow and serve as a change maker in their community. They highlighted their work at the Maryland Book Bank, where they expanded their skills and took on a meaningful role. J emphasized the importance of service reaching diverse, marginalized groups, including the LGBTQIA+ community, and the need for more representation in leadership. They also shared how the program led to a full-time role at the Book Bank and influenced their move from New York to Maryland. J is committed to contributing to the Baltimore community and hopes to become an LGBTQIA+ leader and advocate for community-building.
 - Jax King, a data associate at the Department of Service and Civic Innovation, expressed gratitude for joining the program and shared their move from Montana to Maryland for this opportunity. They highlighted the department's commitment to creating an inclusive program that reflects Maryland's diversity, especially supporting the LGBTQIA+ community. Jax shared a recent interaction where a student asked if they could share their pronouns and identity, and the program's affirmative response reinforced its inclusive nature. They also emphasized the importance of involving LGBTQIA+ ambassadors to promote inclusion and support marginalized communities. Jax concluded by expressing appreciation for the opportunity to contribute to the program's impactful work.
 - Jonathan Smith from the Attorney General's office reaffirmed the commitment to defending the rights of Marylanders, particularly in response to recent federal attacks on the LGBTQIA+ and transgender communities. He introduced the newly established Federal Accountability Unit, designed to address these threats through litigation and participation in agency rulemaking. Smith highlighted Maryland's robust anti-discrimination laws, noting that these state protections remain in place despite federal actions that may conflict with them. He also presented a new guidance document on LGBTQIA+ rights,

acknowledging the challenges created by differing federal and state laws. Smith further discussed the increasing risks of discrimination and hate, encouraging individuals who are affected to reach out to his office for support. In conclusion, he emphasized the importance of unity in the ongoing effort to preserve Maryland's inclusive values.

- V. Chair Report: Chair Blinder acknowledged the difficulty of expressing thoughts surrounding the recent challenges since the inauguration. They discussed the stress caused by executive orders, especially for those with multiple identities, and emphasized the unacceptability of maintaining professionalism while being dehumanized. Chair Blinder encouraged personal grieving and reflection on how others are showing up, both personally and professionally. They also spoke about the emotional toll of seeing older generations return to fight familiar battles, while younger ones face uncertain protection. Chair Blinder urged defiance, stressing the need to resist exclusion and stay engaged in the work, no matter how small the steps. They finished by expressing gratitude for everyone's contributions.
- VI. Vice Chair Report: Vice Chair Pease expressed gratitude for Chair Blinder's remarks and reflected on the grief, pain, and joy experienced by the community, particularly in the mental health field. They emphasized the challenge of balancing community service with processing complex emotions and the importance of finding joy and meaning in the work. Vice Chair Pease highlighted the value of collective care and mutual support within the commission. They shared new research from the Maryland Trans survey on identity, emergency services, and social support. The Vice Chair stressed the importance of using research to advocate for better conditions and finished by offering support to anyone in need.
- VII. Director Report: Director Browning expressed gratitude for the Chair and Vice Chair remarks and expressed his love and care for Commissioners and LGBTQIA+ communities. He provided administrative updates, including reminders about financial disclosures due by April 30th and Senate confirmations. Director Browning thanked everyone for their flexibility with scheduling and reported that most committees have met, with the Policy Committee meeting weekly. He outlined upcoming meetings, including a Commission Meeting on March 10 and a strategic planning retreat on July 19th. Director Browning also reviewed the commission's mandates.
- VIII. Approval - Previous Meeting Minutes: Chair Blinder presented the minutes from the Commission's January 13, 2025 meeting. Commissioner Bryan made a motion to approve the minutes as presented, and Commissioner Russell seconded the motion. The floor was opened for discussion with no additional commentary. The minutes were approved with an abstention from Commissioner Zhāngsūn.
- IX. Discussion and Approval - 2025 Legislative Policy Priorities: Policy Committee Chair Caballero began by expressing gratitude to the Policy Committee for meeting weekly to stay on top of legislative matters. She then requested Director Browning to review the recent updates to the legislative priorities document. Director Browning highlighted key updates, particularly in relation to its impact on the trans community. He also provided a status update on other bills, including those still under consideration and those that had not yet been filed. Policy Committee Chair Caballero further emphasized the significance of the drug paraphernalia decriminalization bill, noting its potential to protect trans individuals, especially regarding hormone replacement therapy.
 - Motion 1: Policy Committee Chair Caballero made a motion to approve the amendments to the 2025 Legislative Policy Priorities as presented and was

seconded by Commissioner Jones. The motion carried with abstentions from Commissioners Stern and Zhāngsūn.

- Motion 2: Policy Committee Chair Caballero made a motion that the Policy Committee will make additions to the legislative policy priorities and then send out an email on Monday (2.17.2025) to the entire Commission on what the addition of those policy priorities are and the Commission has until February 21, 2025 to respond with an objection to one of those policy priority items, with no objection [policy priority updates] will move forward. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Neira. The floor was opened for discussion with no additional commentary added. The motion carried with an abstention from Commissioner Zhāngsūn.
- X. Discussion - Federal Actions: The discussion focused on recent federal executive orders, particularly those impacting the trans and immigrant communities. Chair Lee Blinder noted the ongoing lawsuits against these orders and sought input from the Commission on whether we should issue a statement or call to action in response. The discussion highlighted that Maryland organizations are concerned, but many continue to operate as usual until further direction is given. It was noted that the Department of Defense has paused gender-affirming care and shut down employee resource groups. A proposal was made for the Policy Committee to draft a response statement with a call to action, which got interest from several commissioners who expressed their willingness to contribute to the effort.
- XI. Open Forum for General Remarks or Comments: Commissioners and staff provided various updates on events and activities. Director Browning introduced Valerie Pasquale, the Workplace Advocacy Coordinator at the Baltimore County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Valerie provided an update on the department's ongoing efforts to improve services for the LGBTQIA+ community in Baltimore County. She highlighted her work on collecting accurate data regarding the LGBTQIA+ population served by the department and mentioned the creation of a workgroup aimed at streamlining data collection in clinical services. Valerie also plans to expand these efforts to other divisions. Additionally, she shared the department's focus on providing LGBTQIA+ awareness training and updating policies to ensure inclusivity. Valerie emphasized the importance of these initiatives for promoting health equity across the jurisdiction and expressed gratitude for the Commission's work.
- XII. Closing Remarks: Chair Blinder thanked participants for their ongoing work, acknowledging the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community in Maryland. They stressed the importance of self-care and support to avoid burnout, reminding the group that each person's contribution is vital. They concluded by expressing gratitude for everyone's time and efforts and looked forward to the next meeting.
- XIII. Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 8:00 by Chair Blinder

Minutes respectfully submitted by: Special Assistant, Taylor Harer