



Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs



Photo courtesy of PFLAG Salisbury: Maryland's first Pride and Trans Pride crosswalks in Salisbury, Maryland.

2024 Annual Report

Executive Summary

In 2024, the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs advanced its mandate to assess challenges and propose actionable solutions to improve the lives of LGBTQIA+ Marylanders. Amid rising national hostility toward queer and trans communities, the Commission remained focused on equity, inclusion, and the urgent work of building systems that affirm dignity, safety, and belonging for all.

With support from Governor Wes Moore, allied legislators, and community partners, the Commission helped advance key priorities during the 2024 legislative session. These included strengthening anti-discrimination protections, safeguarding inclusive educational materials, and ensuring gender-affirming care is legally protected healthcare in Maryland. These wins reflect the power of advocacy, coordinated engagement, and shared values.

The Commission also joined statewide efforts to repeal Maryland's outdated HIV criminalization statute. Although the measure did not pass in 2024, it laid the groundwork for future success. In 2025, the bill was renamed the **Carlton R. Smith Act**, honoring the life and legacy of our beloved advocate and community leader. Its eventual passage marked a major step forward for public health, dignity, and justice.

Beyond legislative efforts, the Commission responded swiftly to a series of federal policy rollbacks targeting transgender individuals and families. Through public statements, testimony, and the **Post-Election LGBTQIA+ Community Insights Report**, the Commission gathered critical data from LGBTQIA+ Marylanders across all 24 jurisdictions. The findings revealed widespread psychological distress, decreased sense of safety, and an urgent call for action. In response, the Commission proposed solutions including expanded sanctuary protections for transgender individuals, strengthened access to gender-affirming care, and enhanced enforcement of civil rights protections across education, healthcare, housing, and employment.

Throughout 2024, the Commission worked across State government to promote adoption of its comprehensive policy priorities and best practices which provide practical, community-informed solutions to foster inclusion across agencies, local governments, and institutions. These recommendations address a wide range of issues, including healthcare, education, housing, safety, and data collection, with a focus on intersectional and rural needs.

The report also highlights key operational milestones, including expanded staffing, the launch of a statewide LGBTQIA+ resource directory, a public calendar of LGBTQIA+ events and observances, and the Commission's inaugural **LGBTQIA+ Inclusion Symposium**.

Despite significant challenges, the Commission's work in 2024 reaffirmed the role of public policy as a tool for equity and the importance of centering the voices of LGBTQIA+ communities in building a stronger, more inclusive Maryland. The year's accomplishments, setbacks, and momentum are captured in this report as part of a broader vision in which every LGBTQIA+ Marylander is seen, supported, and able to live freely and fully.



STATE OF MARYLAND

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
Wes Moore

A Letter from Governor Wes Moore

Governor of the State of Maryland

Fellow Marylanders,

Maryland is at its best when we lift each other up, when we lead with compassion, act with courage, and ensure no one is left behind.

Over the past two and a half years, Maryland has made historic strides to protect and affirm the dignity of LGBTQIA+ Marylanders. From signing the Freedom to Read Act into law to safeguarding and expanding access to gender-affirming care, we are building a Maryland that reflects the strength of our diversity and the shared values of equity and inclusion.

But we know the work is far from over. Across the country, LGBTQIA+ communities, especially our transgender neighbors, are facing a coordinated wave of attacks on their rights, their safety, and their humanity. In this moment, we must do more than speak up. We must show up in policy, in practice, and in partnership.

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs continues to be a vital force in this effort. They provide leadership, insight, and advocacy grounded in community. I am deeply grateful for their tireless work and honored to support their mission.

As Governor, I want every LGBTQIA+ person in Maryland to know this: Every child in our classrooms, every elder in our communities, every family, every service member and veteran, and worker has a place in our State. You belong here. No matter who you love or who you are, we will stand up for you and with you.

A special thank you to the entire Commission, including Chair Lee Blinder, 2024 Vice Chair Kijana West, 2025 Vice Chair M Valle Pease, and Director Jeremy Browning for their steadfast leadership and commitment to advancing LGBTQIA+ equity and inclusion in Maryland.

Let us move forward together with boldness, unity, and determination to leave no one behind.

With gratitude,

A blue ink signature of Governor Wes Moore.

Governor Wes Moore (he/him)

100 State Circle, Annapolis, Maryland 21404

(410) 974-3400

TTY Users Call via MD Relay

governor.maryland.gov

Message from the Executive Director of the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives (GOCI)

Dear Marylanders,

At the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives, we believe public service is strongest when it is rooted in trust, partnership, and respect. This past year, that commitment has guided our work with the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs and with community members across the state who are creating safer, more inclusive spaces.

As this report shows, the Commission has continued to lead with integrity and vision, helping agencies and institutions listen more closely, act more thoughtfully, and move forward with policies that reflect and affirm the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ Marylanders.

We also know that the challenges are growing. LGBTQIA+ communities, especially transgender individuals and families, are facing rising hostility nationwide. In Maryland, we must meet this moment with clarity and courage. That means not only defending rights, but advancing them. It means affirming every Marylander's dignity in policy and in practice.

As we reflect on the many achievements from 2024, I want to thank the commissioners and staff for their service and their unwavering dedication to equity. A special thank you to Chair Lee Blinder, Vice Chairs Kijana West and M Pease, and Director Jeremy Browning for their leadership in the face of unprecedented challenges.

At GOCI, we remain proud to support the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs' mission and will continue to work in partnership with all who share the goal of a more just, inclusive Maryland.

Best regards,



Lawrence Walker (he/him)
Executive Director
Governor's Office of Community Initiatives
100 Community Place
Crownsville, MD 21032



Message from the 2024 Chair of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs

Dear LGBTQIA+ Siblings and Allies,

This year has tested our strength and deepened our resolve. Across the country, we have seen growing attacks on transgender people, queer youth, and families simply trying to live with dignity and safety. What may appear as political disputes are, in reality, questions about our humanity and our right to exist. As a transgender and nonbinary Marylander, I carry this reality with me every day. And as Chair of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs, I feel a deep responsibility to respond with honesty, urgency, and care.

In 2024, the Commission advanced critical policy recommendations, supported key legislation, and worked with state agencies to build a more inclusive Maryland. We are especially grateful to Governor Wes Moore for his leadership and support in advancing legislation that protects gender-affirming care, strengthens anti-discrimination laws, and ensures access to inclusive educational materials.

We are proud of what we accomplished in 2024, but now in the face of escalating attacks on LGBTQIA+ communities we must do more. Transgender, nonbinary, Two Spirit, gender diverse, and intersex Marylanders continue to face disproportionate targeting and harm. That is why we must keep showing up for one another and advocate boldly for protection and support until *all* Marylanders can live authentically with dignity and respect.

I know that many in our communities are feeling fearful, frustrated, and unseen. The Commission hears you and stands with you. We are more determined than ever to protect LGBTQIA+ Marylanders and hold our institutions accountable to the promises of equity and inclusion. My fellow volunteer Commissioners and I bring our lived experience, deep commitment, and hearts to this work, and I am deeply proud of our collective efforts.

I am also deeply grateful for the leadership of Vice Chairs Kijana West and M Pease, Director Jeremy Browning, and Special Assistant Taylor Harer. Their dedication and care have made our progress possible.

May we continue to lead with love, lift one another with joy, and stand rooted in solidarity with one another.

In this together,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lee Blinder', with a stylized, cursive script.

Lee Blinder (they/them)

Chair, Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs

Message from the Director of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs

To my fellow LGBTQIA+ Marylanders and Allies,

Serving as your Director of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs is both a privilege and a responsibility I carry with deep respect. In a year marked by both progress and challenge, I've witnessed the power of partnership, the strength of community, and the resilience that drives our mission forward.

Created to serve as the independent voice of LGBTQIA+ Marylanders in State government, the Commission is charged with assessing challenges and advancing solutions to promote equity and inclusion. In 2024, we strengthened that mandate by deepening agency engagement, elevating community priorities, and building out the Commission's infrastructure for long-term impact.

With the support of Governor Wes Moore, seven of the Commission's ten legislative priorities passed in 2024, including protections for gender-affirming care, stronger anti-discrimination laws, and safeguards against book bans. These outcomes reflect not only shared values but also the power of strategic advocacy and coordinated effort.

As we look to the future, we do so clear-eyed about the threats LGBTQIA+ communities continue to face, ranging from national policy rollbacks to local acts of exclusion. Now, the Commission's role is more vital than ever. I'm incredibly proud of the work our Commissioners have done to rise to this moment with purpose, urgency, and care.

I want to extend my sincere thanks to Chair Lee Blinder for their steadfast leadership, as well as to Vice Chairs Kijana West and M Pease, whose dedication continues to shape our work. I'm also deeply grateful to Special Assistant Taylor Harer, whose contributions have strengthened our capacity and reach.

In the year ahead, we remain focused on impact: supporting agencies in implementing inclusive practices, advancing community-informed policy, and ensuring every LGBTQIA+ Marylander is seen, valued, and protected.

In solidarity,



Jeremy Browning (he/him)
Director, Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs

Section 1

About the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs

About the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs

Brief History:

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs was created by the 2021 General Assembly by [House Bill 130](#), sponsored by Delegate Lily Qi. Following the passage of House Bill 130, the 15 member commission was appointed by the Governor and held their first public meeting in January 2022. Once the commissioners were seated, they appointed Director Jeremy Browning (he/him) with approval of the Governor in July 2022. In 2023, the General Assembly altered House Bill 130 with [House Bill 141](#) to expand the Commission from 15-21 members and added “IA+” to the name.

Mission:

To serve LGBTQIA+ Marylanders by galvanizing community voices, researching and addressing challenges, and advocating for policies to advance equity and inclusion.

Vision:

A Maryland where all LGBTQIA+ people are able to live full and authentic lives.

Values:

- **Equity and Justice:** Advocating for equity, systemic change, and centering our most vulnerable community members.
- **Inclusion and Belonging:** Creating affirming environments where historically excluded voices are uplifted, celebrated, and valued.
- **Integrity and Accountability:** Acting transparently, ethically, and responsibly for the communities we serve.
- **Empowerment and Support:** Providing resources, education, and support for individual and community growth.
- **Compassion and Empathy:** Approaching work with intentionality and care to foster understanding and healing.
- **Collaboration and Community Focus:** Working together across diverse communities to create systemic and collective change.
- **Joy and Liberation:** Making space for celebration and love, promoting environments where individuals thrive authentically and freely.
- **Proactive and Innovative Progress:** Continue to be a space of action, moving forward with new ideas and solutions.

Our Role: The Independent Voice for LGBTQIA+ Marylanders

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs was established by the General Assembly as an independent voice, representing the experiences and needs of LGBTQIA+ Marylanders. As the only Statewide LGBTQIA+ commission created through legislation, the Commission operates with the autonomy necessary to assess challenges, elevate community priorities, and advance inclusive policy solutions.

While the Commission works in partnership with the Governor's Office, State agencies, elected officials, and community organizations, its mandate is distinct: to serve as an independent advisory body rooted in transparency, equity, and community engagement. Commissioners and staff are accountable to LGBTQIA+ Marylanders across the State. The Commission is guided by a statutory mandate to research, recommend, and report on the issues that matter most to LGBTQIA+ communities.

Legislative Mandates:

- Assess the challenges facing LGBTQIA+ communities
- Collect data across State agencies on:
 - Implementation of LGBTQIA+-inclusive policies
 - Complaints alleging discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity
- Study and establish best practices for inclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals and communities
- Inform the Executive and Legislative branches of State government of issues concerning LGBTQIA+ persons
- Offer testimony on issues concerning LGBTQIA+ persons before legislative and administrative bodies
- Act as a clearinghouse for activities to avoid duplication of efforts
- Create surveys and appoint advisory committees
- Publish an Annual Report and any other material the Commission considers necessary, that includes recommendations on policies for LGBTQIA+ adults and youth that work to end discriminatory practices in the State
- Seek money from the Federal Government, foundations, and private sources for any of its purposes

Find more information about the Commission at <https://goci.maryland.gov/lgbtq/>.

Commission Meetings

In 2024, the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs held regular meetings bi-monthly virtually on Zoom. Commission meetings are subject to the Maryland Open Meetings Act and members of the public are invited and encouraged to attend.

2024 Commission Meetings

- January 8, 2024
- March 11, 2024
- May 13, 2024
- July 8, 2024
- September 7, 2024 - In-person Strategic Planning Retreat
- September 9, 2024
- November 4, 2024
- December 2, 2024 - Special Meeting to Finalize Strategic Planning

View upcoming meetings, agendas and meeting minutes by visiting:

<https://goci.maryland.gov/lgbtq/meetings/>

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs strives to make its meetings as accessible as possible. If you need accommodations or assistance, please contact the Commission at LGBTQIA@maryland.gov at least one week prior to the meeting.

Commission Committees

Committees meet at the discretion of the committee chairs. Standing committees and advisory committees are also subject to the Maryland Open Meetings Act. View upcoming meetings, agendas and meeting minutes by visiting: <https://goci.maryland.gov/lgbtq/meetings/>

Standing Committees

- Policy
- Development

Advisory Committees

- Youth & Education
- Health & Wellness

Special Committees*

- Ad-hoc Strategic Planning

**Special committees include ad-hoc committees and workgroups which are not subject to the Maryland Open Meetings Act.*

Maryland LGBTQIA+ Resource Directory

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs has created a public resource directory of LGBTQIA+ affirming resources across the State. The public resource directory can be accessed here: <https://goci.maryland.gov/resources-3/>



Join the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs Email List:

Stay up to date with Commission meetings, activities, community events, and more!

Visit: <https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/su/2HquHmX/LGBTQIA> or scan QR code:



Commission Calendar of LGBTQIA+ Events and Days of Significance:

The Commission maintains a calendar of Pride celebrations, community events, and LGBTQIA+ days of significance. [View the calendar here](#) or scan the QR code:



Members of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs

The 21-member Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs reflects the age, gender, gender identity or expression, ancestral, national origin, color, disability, religious, sex, sexual orientation, racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and geographic diversity of the State of Maryland. Members are required to know the issues facing the LGBTQIA+ communities and advocate for solutions to the problems facing LGBTQIA+ communities.

Commissioners and Officers as of June 2025

Chair: Lee Blinder (they/them)

Baltimore City



Mx. Lee Blinder (they/them) is a proud, openly nonbinary, transgender, and queer Marylander, and the founding Executive Director of Trans Maryland. They are the first openly transgender chair of a Maryland Commission. They recently served on Governor Wes Moore's transition team and they sit on LGBTQIA+ advisory boards around the State. Mx. Blinder facilitates transgender 101 and gender-affirming workplace training for government, medical organizations, and private companies. Additionally, they lead Trans Maryland's peer-to-peer name and gender marker change program. They have worked in service to their community for over 27 years, helping launch the Gender Sexuality

Alliance (GSA) at Montgomery Blair High School in 1996. They enjoy spending time with their adopted animal companions: their cat Basil Pasta Marinara, and their dogs Cupcake and Chickpea.

Vice Chair: M Valle Pease, M.S. (they/them)

Montgomery County



M Valle Pease is a doctoral student in counseling psychology at the University of Maryland, College Park and Director of Research and Assessment at Trans Maryland. Supported by a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship award, their research program broadly explores race, gender, and sexuality, how systems of oppression contribute to mental health disparities, and experiences of strength and joy in community. They have engaged in research-based advocacy and teaching efforts to promote social and organizational change, especially around promoting trans rights, culturally competent mental health services, and broader intersectional social justice. In the pursuit of equity, decolonization, and liberation, M's work seeks to bridge science with advocacy and activism efforts that tangibly improve conditions for marginalized communities.

Rev. Ali K.C. Bell (he/Rev. Bell)

Montgomery County



Rev. Ali K.C. Bell is an esteemed Black, Neurodivergent, and Transgender leader with over 35 years of experience advocating for under-resourced communities. He serves as the Minister of Congregational Life and Engagement at Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Bethesda, MD, and as Chaplain for the Unitarian Universalist at Riderwood Covenanting Community in Silver Spring, MD. An ordained Unitarian Universalist Minister, Rev. Bell holds a Master of Divinity from Meadville Lombard Theological School and a Master of Social Work from the University of Central Florida. His ministry is defined by an unwavering commitment to

equity and justice, championing victim rights and domestic violence advocacy. A founding youth member and previous board member of the Attic Youth Center in Philadelphia, he has long supported LGBTQIA+ youth and their unique needs. Currently, Rev. Bell co-chairs the LGBTQIA cohort of the Montgomery County Anti-Hate Task Force and the Maryland Coalition of Inclusive Schools and Communities.

Joan Bryan (she/her)

Baltimore County



Joan is a devoted LGBTQIA+ advocate and ally with a profound passion for supporting queer and trans youth. An enthusiastic member of Free Mom Hugs, Inc., she is a member of PFLAG in Howard and Baltimore Counties. She also co-founded an Anti-Racist Discussion group with the Baltimore County Public Library, focusing on intersectional issues, in 2020. Bringing her 44 years of federal government service, coupled with her BA and MS degrees in Human Services Administration from Notre Dame of Maryland University, Joan is uniquely qualified to contribute meaningfully to the Commission's mission. As a widow, mother, and proud grandmother of a trans

grandson, Joan brings both professional expertise and personal empathy to her advocacy work, ensuring a compassionate and informed approach. She lives with feline companions Thelma and Louise.

Josie Caballero (she/her)

Montgomery County



Josie Caballero is an influential Latina transgender leader and the Director of the 2022 US Transgender Survey and Special Projects at the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE). She is instrumental in the success and reach of the 2022 US Trans Survey, collaborating with researchers, academics, and activists to foster a more inclusive and respectful society for the trans community. Josie leverages her exceptional skills in coalition building, policy development, and community advocacy to enhance the visibility and understanding of transgender issues. Additionally, Josie serves as Vice

President of the Transgender American Veterans Association (TAVA). She combines a six-year tenure in the Navy as a nuclear reactor operator with a decade-long expertise in political management and consulting, where she championed vital causes across the United States.

Amit “Mickey” Dhir (he/him), MBA, MSN, AGNP-C, AAHIVS
Baltimore City



Mickey is an infectious disease Nurse Practitioner at Chase Brexton Health Care, specializing in HIV/STI management and prevention, and primary care for LGBTQIA+ populations. In his Ph.D. studies at Johns Hopkins University, Mickey is exploring the Acceptability and Impact of Long-acting (LA) Injectable Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) among same-gender loving men and transgender women in Baltimore. As a community leader and advocate, he has partnered with local organizations like the Baltimore City Health Department and U equals U (Undetectable equals Untransmissible) campaign to educate communities about HIV management and prevention. Additionally, Mickey leads efforts to address health disparities and actively involves clinicians in implementing evidence-based HIV prevention care models in the U.S. and internationally. On the Commission, Mickey works to address HIV treatment and prevention access issues, such as medication access, medical coverage, etc., and increased funding for HIV treatment and prevention services. He is dedicated to fostering positive change and ensuring equitable access to quality medical care for all.

Kurt Doan (he/him)
Harford County



Dr. Kurt Doan is a higher education professional with 28 years of experience working for colleges and universities nationwide. Born and raised in rural Lancaster, Pennsylvania, he became involved in LGBTQIA+ advocacy while attending Penn State University. As a graduate student at the University of Arizona, he served as President of the LGB Graduate Student Alliance and became involved with Safe Zone—a program aimed at improving the campus climate for LGBTQIA+ students. In Arizona, he served as a trained crisis intervention specialist for the Wingspan Domestic Violence Project—a program that works to address and end violence in the lives of LGBTQIA+ people. Kurt completed a doctorate in higher education leadership at Wilmington University in May 2021; his thesis focused on the data invisibility of LGBTQIA+ community college students. He currently serves as the President of Upper Chesapeake Bay Pride.

Deborah Dunn (she/her), PAC, MBA

Prince George's County



Deborah Dunn, PAC, MBA, is a distinguished family practice Physician Assistant and excited to join the Resolve MD: Direct Primary Care private practice in January 2025. Graduating from Howard University in 1983 and holding an MBA from Johns Hopkins University, Dunn provides leadership in transgender care, establishing best practices, training medical providers, and advocating at the State level. She played a pivotal role in creating Gender: Joy (Journey of Youth), a program for trans/gender-diverse youth. Recognized as Physician Assistant of the Year in 2018 and 2021, and a Health Care Hero in 2018, she serves on various boards, including the Maryland Board of Physicians, Physician Assistant Advisory, and the American Academy of Physician Assistants DEI commission.

Anthony E. Fox (he/him), MS, PhD(c), LGPC

Prince George's County



Anthony Fox, MS, PhD(c), LGPC, is the Division Chief at the DC Department of Health. He oversees the Capacity Building, Housing, and Community Partnerships Division within the HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis, STD, and TB Administration. He is a proud resident of Prince George's County and brings 28 years of Public Health and Health Care experience to the Commission, with a focus on HIV Prevention and Care for 20 years. Previously, he served as Deputy Director for Chronic Disease at the Mississippi State Department of Health and as a Lead Trainer/Capacity Building Assistance Manager for the Mississippi

Prevention Training Center and Jackson State University. Anthony is affiliated with several professional organizations and has received numerous awards for his dedication to communities. Passionate about empowering African American and LGBTQIA+ communities, Anthony volunteers extensively and advocates for mental health alongside physical well-being. In his leisure, he enjoys travel, swimming, and movies.

Dr. Nicole A. Hollywood (she/her)

Wicomico County



Dr. Hollywood is the Interim Director of Assessment in the Office of the Provost at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore where her areas of expertise are media uses and effects, student learning outcomes assessment, DEI, information literacy, culturally responsive practices, student success, and technological innovation. She received doctorate and master's degrees from Columbia University and earned a post-doctorate from Tulane University. She has authored over 40 peer-reviewed journal articles, as well as three books and several book chapters, and currently serves as Editor-in-Chief of the International

Journal of Doctoral Studies. In her free time, she provides her public relations and marketing skills pro bono to several nonprofits and advocacy organizations focused on social justice and reducing violence.

Asher Kennedy (he/him)

Washington County



Asher is a trans masculine representative from Washington County, Maryland. Born in LaPlata and raised in Hagerstown, he works towards equity and true affirmation of all Marylanders. He has served on the Board of Hagerstown Hopes since 2018, currently serving as Vice President and chair of the Trans Committee. Between his professional work as a Title I Liaison with Washington County Public Schools, his work with Hagerstown Hopes, and this esteemed panel of leaders from around the State, his dedication is to ensure a better tomorrow for our youth and our State as a whole.

Dr. Stephen Martin (he/him), M.D.

Baltimore City



Stephen, originally from Northern Virginia, obtained his undergraduate degree from the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, VA. Afterward, he worked with Habitat for Humanity in Louisiana, coordinating home construction for hurricane victims. Subsequently, he moved to Washington, D.C., and earned his medical degree from the Howard University College of Medicine. Completing his residency at Johns Hopkins Hospital, Stephen joined Johns Hopkins Community Physicians (JHCP) as an obstetrician, gynecologist, and assistant professor. Within JHCP, he has been instrumental in developing programs for gender-affirming care in the field of obstetrics and gynecology. His clinical expertise extends to gender-affirming surgical care, with notable contributions in surgical technique, preventative screening, and trauma-informed care for gender-diverse patients. Stephen has received recognition for his outstanding contributions, including the Johns Hopkins Medicine Pride Month Achievers Award in 2021.

Paula M. Neira (she/her), JD, RN, FAAN

Prince George's County



Paula graduated with distinction from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1985. After leaving the Navy, she became a registered nurse, specializing in emergency nursing. She was the founding Clinical Program Director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Transgender Health. She currently serves as the Johns Hopkins Medicine Program Director of LGBTQ+ Equity and Education. A member of the Maryland bar since 2001, Paula helped lead efforts to repeal the Don't Ask, Don't Tell law and change military regulations to allow for transgender military service. In 2020, she was inducted as a Fellow into the American Academy of Nursing in recognition of her leadership in advancing diversity and inclusion both in the United States Armed Forces and in healthcare. She is the first United States Service Academy graduate to achieve this honor in American nursing.

Wendy Novak (she/her)

Carroll County



Wendy is a devoted parent of three and serves as a research administrator at the University of Maryland, Baltimore. With a background in Psychology from UMBC and an MS in Accounting Information Systems from UMGC, she recently completed a Master of Science in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Leadership at UMB. In addition to her role at the university, she is an active Girl Scout Leader and a dedicated church volunteer. Wendy's advocacy work centers around promoting inclusion in local schools. Her efforts include presenting written and verbal testimonies at Board of Education meetings and to the State legislature. Wendy is passionate about creating safe and inclusive environments for all students and is

committed to fostering a sense of belonging within schools.

Brandon Russell (he/him)

St. Mary's County



Brandon is a community organizer, advocate, and lifelong resident of St. Mary's County. He holds a bachelor's degree in English, and has 15 years experience in operations management and analytics. Brandon previously served on the St. Mary's County Democratic Central Committee, and the Maryland Democratic Party's Rural County Committee and LGBTQ+ Diversity Leadership Council. He was an At-Large Member of the Policy Committee for the Moore/Miller Administration's transition team. Brandon is currently the 2nd Vice President of the St. Mary's County Democratic Club, and Vice-Chair of

Pride Southern Maryland, a volunteer non-profit that hosts an annual LGBTQIA+ pride celebration. In 2022, Brandon was one of the first openly gay candidates to run for St. Mary's County Commissioner. Today, he continues advocating for rural communities.

Sarah Stern (she/they)

Baltimore City



Sarah is a proud Two Spirit Citizen of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma and lives on the unceded lands of the Piscataway and Susquehannock Nations (Baltimore, Maryland). Sarah obtained their honors Bachelor of Arts degree in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and a concentration in Native American Studies from Columbia University in 2016. Sarah works in public health writing to support community-based health programming and sustainable initiatives led by Indigenous cultural strengths for both the Johns Hopkins Center for Indigenous Health as well as Native American LifeLines. Sarah co-led the planning council of the inaugural Eastern Two Spirit Gathering in

2023 and in their free time enjoys cooking and connecting with nature.

Joseph Toolan (he/him)

Anne Arundel County



Joe is the Senior Manager of America the Beautiful for All Coalition Strategy and Development, working to conserve 30% of lands, waters, and oceans by 2030 for frontline and communities of color. With a background in philanthropy, behavior change, and capacity building, he earned a B.A. in Geographical Sciences from the University of Maryland and a Nonprofit Management Certificate from Georgetown University. Born in Guatemala and adopted in the 90s, Joe is a queer, Latine, Indigenous, transracial adoptee who grew up in Maryland. He chairs Annapolis Pride, served as the inaugural Chair of the Maryland Commission for LGBTQIA+ Affairs, and contributes to diversity and

environmental efforts like the Naturally Latinos Conference and Chesapeake Watershed Forum. He also serves on the boards of Adoptees with Guatemalan Roots and Out for Sustainability.

Ly Xīnzhèn Zhǎngsūn, J.D. (they/them)

(Lydia X. Z. Brown)

Baltimore County



Ly Xīnzhèn Zhǎngsūn, J.D. (Lydia X. Z. Brown) is an internationally recognized advocate, organizer, attorney, strategist, scholar, and writer whose work addresses interpersonal and State violence targeting disabled people at intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, faith, language, and nation. Ly Xīnzhèn is Assistant Teaching Professor of Disability Studies at Georgetown University, as well as Law and Public Policy Discipline Coordinator for the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities Program. Ly Xīnzhèn is Director of Public Policy at National Disability Institute and Founding Executive Director of The Autistic People of Color Fund.

They serve as board treasurer of the Disability Rights Bar Association and Disability Justice Committee representative to the National Lawyers Guild board. Ly Xīnzhèn has also served as advisor to the Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network, Nonbinary & Intersex Recognition Project, and Transgender Law Center.



*September 7, 2024 - Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs Strategic Planning Retreat -
Crownsville, Anne Arundel County*

Honoring the Contributions of Departed Commissioners

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs extends heartfelt gratitude to **Nicolas Augustine (he/him)**, **Tina Jones (she/her)**, **Jabari Lyles (they/them)**, **August Clayton (any pronouns)**, **Mark Ridderhoff (he/him)**, and 2024 Vice Chair **Kijana West (she/her)** for their outstanding service as commissioners. Each brought a depth of experience, insight, and advocacy that strengthened the Commission's mission and advanced equity for LGBTQIA+ Marylanders.

Their collective contributions helped lay the groundwork for meaningful change, fostered vital partnerships, and ensured that the voices of LGBTQIA+ communities were heard and valued. While their terms have come to a close, their impact continues to shape our work and inspire our ongoing efforts to create a more inclusive and just Maryland.

Staff of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs is supported by a small but dedicated team working to advance equity and inclusion across the State. Staff are appointed to carry out the Commission's legislative mandate, provide policy guidance, and foster engagement with community members, government agencies, and advocacy partners.

Jeremy Browning (he/him)

Director, Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs



Jeremy Browning was appointed Director of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs in 2022, following his selection by the Commission and approval by the Governor. He oversees the Commission's day-to-day operations, advises on strategic direction, and represents LGBTQIA+ communities in State-level policy discussions. He also serves as the liaison between the Commission, the Governor's Office, and the Maryland General Assembly. Prior to this role, Jeremy founded Annapolis Pride Inc. and has dedicated his career to advancing LGBTQIA+ inclusion and equity across the public and nonprofit sectors.

Taylor Harer (they/she)

Special Assistant, Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs



Taylor Harer joined the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs as the Special Assistant in July 2024. With a career marked by a strong commitment to advocacy and community support, Taylor brings a wealth of experience from roles as an EMT to their academic background in sociology and criminal justice. Their dedication to community organizing and a proactive approach make them a valuable asset in fostering inclusivity and advancing the Commission's mission. Outside of work, Taylor enjoys reading, experimenting with new recipes, and spending quality time at home with their partner, their three cats, and their dog.

Section 2

Challenges Facing LGBTQIA+ Communities in Maryland

Challenges Facing LGBTQIA+ Communities in Maryland

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs is charged with assessing challenges facing LGBTQIA+ communities in Maryland. The Commission's previous annual reports ([2022 Annual Report](#) and [2023 Annual Report](#)) include national, State, and local data demonstrating challenges in almost every aspect of daily life from housing, healthcare, education, and employment, while living with increased risks of discrimination, harassment, and violence. The 2024 Annual Report expands upon the two previous reports and summarizes the direct and escalating attacks from the federal government targeting LGBTQIA+ Marylanders.

Federal Attacks on LGBTQIA+ Marylanders

In March 2025, the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs issued a formal [statement](#) responding to an unprecedented series of anti-transgender actions at the federal level. These attacks from executive orders, administrative rollbacks, to reinterpretations of civil rights laws threaten the rights, safety, and access to healthcare, education, and public life for transgender Marylanders, particularly youth, service members, and veterans.

Despite Maryland's legal protections, the Commission notes that federal actions are creating fear and instability, emboldening discrimination, and undermining the State's progress on equity and inclusion.

Key federal actions include:

- A proposed nationwide ban on transition-related care for minors and the threat of withholding federal funding from providers.
- Title IX reinterpretations encouraging discrimination and forced outing of trans students in schools.
- Reinstatement of the transgender military ban and cancellation of gender-affirming care for trans service members and veterans.
- Rollbacks in employment protections and the removal of LGBTQIA+ safeguards in federal surveillance protocols.
- Restrictions on trans athlete participation and punitive policies aimed at trans refugees seeking safety in Maryland.

Post-Election LGBTQIA+ Community Insights Report

In the wake of the 2024 presidential election, the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs launched a comprehensive community listening and data collection effort to understand the fears, needs, and priorities of LGBTQIA+ Marylanders amid anticipated federal rollbacks. This effort included a virtual listening session and a public community questionnaire that garnered

786 responses from all 24 Maryland jurisdictions. Below you can find a summary of the findings and access the full [Post-Election LGBTQIA+ Community Insights Report here](#).

Key Findings:

- **Widespread Fear of Federal Retaliation:** Respondents expressed overwhelming concern about the impact of political shifts on LGBTQIA+ rights (mean = 4.66 out of 5) and on transgender rights specifically (mean = 4.70). Many also feared a rise in hate and bias incidents (mean = 4.59).
- **Decreased Sense of Safety:** A significant portion of LGBTQIA+ Marylanders reported feeling less safe in their communities following the election (mean = 3.82).
- **Elevated Psychological Distress:** Using the validated Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K6), the average psychological distress score among LGBTQIA+ respondents was 11.36. Transgender and gender-expansive individuals had significantly higher scores (mean = 12.93), indicating a heightened emotional toll and potential risk for mental health concerns.
- **Top Advocacy Priorities Identified by the Community:**
 - Protecting access to gender-affirming care and reproductive rights (35%)
 - Strengthening civil rights protections (15%)
 - Enacting sanctuary State policies and supports for LGBTQIA+ people relocating to Maryland (8%)
 - Safeguarding marriage, adoption, and family rights (8%)
 - Advancing inclusive education policies and accurate LGBTQIA+ representation (7%)
 - Combating disinformation and public bias (7%)
- Other priorities included protections against hate crimes, housing and economic security, identity documentation, workplace discrimination, and improved access to mental health support.

These insights highlight both the emotional toll of the post-election environment and the urgency for Maryland to enact and uphold State-level protections, especially for transgender and nonbinary residents.

National, State, and Local Data Demonstrating Challenges Impacting LGBTQIA+ Marylanders

National Data

Advocates for Trans Equality has released two important reports following the 2023 Annual Report informed by the experiences of 84,000 trans people from across the United States.

Health and Wellbeing: Findings from the 2022 U.S. Trans Survey

In June 2025, Advocates for Trans Equality released their latest report, [Health and Wellbeing: Findings from the 2022 U.S. Trans Survey](#). This new report provides important insights into the health and wellbeing of the trans community, including a comprehensive resource with data on the physical and mental health of trans people, as well as analysis of their interactions with healthcare providers and transition-related care.

Key findings:

- **Living out our true identities is crucial to health and wellbeing.** Respondents who had socially or medically transitioned reported having better health and being more satisfied with their life, compared to those who hadn't.
- **Family support is not just important for health—it's lifesaving.** Respondents with supportive families reported substantially better health and fewer thoughts of suicide than those with unsupportive families.
- **Most trans people are getting the routine and mental healthcare they need.** Most respondents were able to access routine and mental healthcare when they needed it. Compared to 2015, when the survey was previously conducted, more respondents felt treated with respect by their healthcare provider.
- **Access to transition-related care is increasing, but gaps in healthcare access and outcomes remain.** More respondents received transition-related care in 2022 compared to 2015, but the gap between those who wanted it and those who received it was significant. Respondents also reported worse health and were insured at lower rates compared to the general population.

Civic Engagement Among Transgender People in the U.S.

In August 2024, the Advocates for Trans Equality Education Fund released [Civic Engagement in the 2022 U.S. Transgender Survey](#), highlighting robust political and civic participation among transgender adults in the United States. The report drew from over 84,000 adult respondents, making it the largest survey of its kind.

Key findings include:

- **High Voter Engagement:** 82% of eligible transgender respondents were registered to vote in the 2020 election, which is higher than the general U.S. population (73%). Additionally, 75% reported voting, compared to 67% nationally.
- **Barriers to Participation:** Despite high participation rates, transgender voters faced unique barriers such as ID mismatches, fear of harassment, and confusion over voting laws. These challenges disproportionately impacted trans people of color and those with lower incomes.
- **Broad Civic Engagement:** Outside of voting, 81% of respondents had engaged in civic or political activity in the past year, including petition signing, contacting government officials, and attending rallies.
- **Top Policy Priorities:** Respondents identified violence against transgender people (46%), racial justice (38%), access to trans-related healthcare (34%), poverty (28%), and housing (27%) as their top policy concerns.

These findings underscore the critical role that transgender Americans play in civic life, even as they face disproportionate risks and structural barriers. Ensuring safe and accessible participation in public life remains a key equity priority.

2024 Trevor Project Survey on LGBTQ+ Youth Mental Health

The [Trevor Project's 2024 U.S. National Survey](#), based on responses from over 18,000 LGBTQ+ young people ages 13 to 24, paints a sobering picture of the mental health crisis facing queer and trans youth, particularly transgender and nonbinary youth and youth of color.

Key findings include:

- **Suicide Risk:** 39% of LGBTQ+ youth seriously considered suicide in the past year, including 46% of transgender and nonbinary respondents. 12% attempted suicide, with significantly higher rates among youth of color.
- **Mental Health Access:** While 84% of respondents wanted mental health care, half were unable to access it. Cost, fear of being outed, and lack of affirming providers were key barriers.

- **Political Climate:** 90% reported that recent anti-LGBTQ+ politics negatively affected their well-being, with nearly half of trans and nonbinary youth considering moving to another State due to harmful laws.
- **Victimization:** 49% of LGBTQ+ youth ages 13–17 were bullied, and 23% experienced physical harm due to their identity. Rates of suicide attempts were significantly higher among those who experienced discrimination, harassment, or conversion therapy.
- **Affirming Environments:** LGBTQ+ youth with access to affirming homes, schools, and communities reported significantly lower rates of suicide attempts. Respecting pronouns, offering gender-neutral bathrooms, and providing access to gender-affirming clothing were among the most protective factors.

This national data provides urgent context for State-level policymaking and underscores the need for affirming, accessible, and identity-specific services and protections for LGBTQIA+ youth in Maryland.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and LGBTQIA+ Youth

A [2024 report](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirms that LGBTQIA+ youth are disproportionately affected by adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), including bullying, family rejection, unstable housing, and community violence. The report also affirms that discrimination based on sexual or gender identity is itself a form of trauma that can negatively impact health across the lifespan.

Key findings include:

- LGBTQIA+ youth are significantly more likely than their peers to experience ACEs such as sexual violence, food insecurity, and homelessness.
- Discrimination, including homophobia and transphobia, is an ACE, and has long-term impacts on physical and mental health.
- A 2021 survey across six states found that over 1 in 4 high school students reported discrimination due to their sexual identity.
- The CDC recommends expanding access to positive childhood experiences (PCEs) through safe schools, supportive families, inclusive community programs, and affirming after-school activities.

These findings reinforce the urgent need for trauma-informed and identity-affirming public systems, including education, health, housing, and child welfare, to promote resilience and counter systemic harm. The Commission continues to advocate for policies that prevent ACEs, especially through inclusive education, community support, and culturally competent services.

State Data

The [Maryland Trans Survey](#) is a community-based research project conducted by Trans Maryland and the Queer/Trans Collective for Research on Equity and Wellness to examine the experiences of trans people in the State of Maryland. To date, this is the largest of its kind in the State, encompassing 750 transgender, nonbinary, genderqueer, and gender individuals from across all 23 counties and Baltimore City. Since the publication of the [initial findings report](#) in March 2024, the team has published reports on experiences with [identity documents](#), [social support](#), and [emergency services](#). Key findings include:

- **Identity Documents**
 - 14.4% of respondents had their correct gender on all IDs and records
 - 35.3% had their correct name on all IDs and records
 - Individuals with lower income (< \$35,000) and disabilities were significantly less likely to have their name and gender reflected on their ID documents
- **Social Support**
 - A majority of respondents reported being very satisfied (40.5%) or somewhat satisfied (40.5%) with their networks of support
 - Support network satisfaction was significantly correlated with lower levels of psychological distress (i.e., symptoms of anxiety and depression; $r = -.29$, $p < .001$).
 - Family of origin was reported as part of social support networks for only 47.5% of respondents, whereas friends and chosen family were reported as part of social support networks for 87.0% and 70.1%, respectively.
- **Emergency Services**
 - 75.1% of respondents reported being very uncomfortable or somewhat uncomfortable with potentially asking for help from police in a medical emergency and 67.2% specified that discomfort with police was connected to their trans status/gender identity
 - 22.5% reported they would not call 911 if they were the victim of a crime and 38.8% had bad experiences with police in the past
 - When considering race, gender identity, and location, we found that trans women of color and trans people who lived in rural locations were the two groups most likely to report having trouble with the police in the past year (compared to white trans people and suburban and urban located trans Marylanders)

GLSEN's State Report Card: K-12 LGBTQIA+ Inclusion in Maryland (2025)

[GLSEN's 2025 Maryland State Report Card](#) evaluates State policies that impact the safety and inclusion of LGBTQIA+ students in Maryland's K-12 schools. Maryland received an **overall grade of A**, meeting expectations across key areas that foster supportive school environments for LGBTQIA+ youth. However, despite receiving an overall grade of A, significant challenges exist for LGBTQIA+ students.

Key findings include **bullying and harassment**:

- **53% of LGBTQIA+ students reported being verbally harassed** due to sexual orientation.
- **28% were physically harassed** or assaulted based on gender identity.
- **64% of students who were harassed never reported the incident.**
- **46% experienced discrimination in school settings**, disproportionately affecting transgender and nonbinary youth.

Local Data

Garrett County Diversity and Inclusion Report (2024)

The [Garrett County Diversity and Inclusion Report \(2024\)](#), developed by the Garrett County Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee, presents serious concerns about the safety, inclusion, and well-being of LGBTQIA+ individuals living in or visiting Garrett County.

Key Takeaways:

- **Discrimination and Safety Concerns:** LGBTQIA+ individuals reported experiencing regular discrimination, harassment, and fear for their physical safety, particularly at night or in public spaces. Listening session participants described being subjected to slurs, microaggressions, and threats, including being told to “change [their] ways” or face harm.
- **Youth Vulnerability:** LGBTQIA+ youth expressed that Garrett County public schools are unsafe. They reported being bullied by both students and some staff, with little intervention. In one case, a student who feared for their life brought a knife to school for protection. Gender-neutral bathrooms were described as unsafe and vandalized, with hateful graffiti and surveillance by peers.
- **Unwelcoming Community:** Both residents and visitors stated that Garrett County is not welcoming to LGBTQIA+ people. Some LGBTQIA+ individuals actively avoid the area, while others cited being warned not to visit. The perception is reinforced by inaction from community leaders and institutions.
- **Survey Results:**
 - Only **39% of LGBTQIA+ respondents** felt accepted or included in Garrett County, compared to 80% of heterosexual respondents.

- **56%** of LGBTQIA+ people reported **experiencing discrimination**, and **80%** reported witnessing discrimination.
- Just **50%** of LGBTQIA+ respondents said they **felt safe** in the county (compared to 88% of heterosexual respondents).
- Only **30%** believed their children are treated fairly in school; **57%** said their children experienced bullying.
- **Only 25%** felt there are **fair and equal employment opportunities** for LGBTQIA+ individuals.
- **Mental Health Impact:** Lack of mental health services, especially for LGBTQIA+ youth, was a critical issue. Many youth reported depression, suicidal ideation, and feeling isolated.

Recommendations Relevant to LGBTQIA+ Inclusion:

- Adopt a **Welcoming Resolution** for the County to publicly affirm inclusion.
- Establish a **County-level position** dedicated to leading diversity and inclusion efforts.
- Provide **ongoing training** for schools, businesses, and community leaders to address bias and discrimination.
- Ensure **safe spaces** for LGBTQIA+ youth and support mental health infrastructure.
- Support **inclusive events and festivals** that affirm LGBTQIA+ identities.
- Improve **communication infrastructure** to make local LGBTQIA+ resources more accessible.

UCBPride Foundation 2024 Community Needs Assessment

The UCBPride Foundation conducted its first comprehensive [Community Needs Assessment](#) in 2024 to better understand the lived experiences and needs of LGBTQIA+ individuals in Harford and Cecil Counties, Maryland. With responses from 163 LGBTQIA+ individuals, the survey provides a critical foundation for regional programming, advocacy, and inclusion efforts. The report highlights both the resilience of the community and the systemic gaps in healthcare, housing, workplace inclusion, and public visibility. These findings underscore the urgent need for greater investment, education, and allyship to support LGBTQIA+ individuals in rural Maryland.

Key Findings:

- **Demographics:** Respondents were diverse in age (median age ~38), with strong representation from individuals in their 30s and 40s. Over 27% identified as transgender or gender non-conforming. While most were White and cisgender, responses also highlighted racial and gender diversity across the region.
- **Quality of Life Indicators:**
 - 82% reported being happy overall, but 18% expressed some level of unhappiness.
 - Over one-third rated their health as “fair” or “poor,” with several citing difficulty accessing competent LGBTQIA+ healthcare.
 - Workplace acceptance was mixed: 53% reported their employer was very accepting, while nearly half said their workplaces were only somewhat or not accepting.
 - Notable portions of the community experienced job insecurity (25%), housing insecurity (13%), food insecurity (12%), and transportation insecurity (12%). Social media, LGBTQIA+ organizations, and personal networks were top sources for information.

Community Recommendations - Respondents emphasized the need for:

- A dedicated LGBTQIA+ community center
- More inclusive and visible public support from local leaders
- Expanded queer-affirming healthcare and mental health services
- LGBTQIA+ education and training in schools, healthcare settings, and local businesses
- Enhanced visibility for queer-owned businesses and safe spaces
- Greater ally engagement and local political advocacy

Section 3

2024 Policy Priorities, Recommendations, and Best Practices

Policy Priorities, Recommendations, and Best Practices

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs remains steadfast in its mission to assess challenges, elevate community voices, and provide informed recommendations to ensure LGBTQIA+ Marylanders are seen, supported, and protected in policy and in practice. In 2024 and early 2025, the Commission released a series of reports and public statements responding to urgent needs in the community and outlining policy recommendations to inform administrative, legislative, and public action.

Addressing the National Crisis Targeting Transgender Communities

In the [statement on the Federal Attacks on Transgender Marylanders](#), the Commission emphasized the rapid escalation of anti-transgender legislation and rhetoric across the country, including attacks on healthcare access, education rights, and public recognition. The Commission called on Maryland to:

- Ensure sustained State investment in gender-affirming healthcare, housing, and safety initiatives.
- Proactively affirm transgender Marylanders in public statements and policy platforms.
- Protect the rights of trans youth, veterans, families, and service members through inclusive State-level policies and services.

HIV Funding Crisis Response

In May 2024, the Commission released an [Urgent Call to Address the HIV Funding Crisis in Maryland](#), warning of severe health disparities due to an abrupt 76% cut in federal HIV funding to Baltimore and concerns about broader impacts Statewide. Unfortunately, HIV treatment and prevention programs continue to face funding cuts. The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs and the Health & Wellness Committee is working closely with the Maryland Department of Health to find creative solutions to ensure those living with HIV and those at higher risk of contracting HIV have access to care.

Federal Defense Authorization Act Response

Following passage of the *National Defense Authorization Act* in December 2024—which included a ban on TRICARE coverage of gender-affirming care for minors in military families—the Commission issued a strong [statement](#) condemning this unprecedented federal attack on LGBTQIA+ military families. The Commission:

- Called on members of Maryland’s congressional delegation to reconsider their votes that harm transgender service members and their children.

- Affirmed its support for transgender troops and military families living in Maryland.
- Invited all federal representatives to meet with the Commission and LGBTQIA+ constituents to build understanding and accountability.

Transgender Day of Visibility (TDoV) Statement and Call to Action

In April 2025, the Commission adopted a [statement](#) reaffirming support for Governor Wes Moore and calling for sustained action to protect transgender lives. The statement highlighted the urgent need for:

- Meaningful State investment in the safety, healthcare, housing, and economic stability of transgender Marylanders.
- Public and private sector collaboration to support transgender communities and combat stigma, isolation, and violence.
- Unity and genuine partnership to meet this moment of crisis with solutions that uplift rather than divide.

These policy positions reflect both immediate concerns and long-term structural needs expressed by the community and are grounded in data, constituent input, and national best practices.

Policy Priorities, Best Practices and Recommendations from A to Z

In November 2023, the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs adopted its 2024 [2024 Policy Priorities, Best Practices and Recommendations](#), a comprehensive 27-page document developed in collaboration with community members from across the State. The resource outlines the most pressing issues facing LGBTQIA+ Marylanders and provides policy guidance and actionable recommendations for State and local leaders, agencies, and advocates.

The 2024 recommendations reflect a broad and intersectional understanding of lived experience, ensuring that issues affecting LGBTQIA+ Marylanders across every age, race, ability, and background are addressed.

Top Priority: Funding and Resource Allocation

Maryland continues to face an urgent need for increased funding to support LGBTQIA+ health, safety, and inclusion statewide. Despite meaningful progress, chronic underinvestment in affirming resources, especially for historically excluded communities, remains a persistent barrier to equity.

The Commission continues to recommend:

- **Increased state budget allocations** to support LGBTQIA+ inclusion across state agencies.
- **Dedicated staffing** and LGBTQIA+ cultural competency training across government entities.
- **Creation of an LGBTQIA+ Fund** to support grassroots and community-based organizations delivering life-saving services—especially for trans, youth, BIPOC, rural, and disabled community members.

These priorities were underscored in public comments, agency engagement, and our statewide reports summarized in Section 5 of this report, including *A Decade of Data* and the *Post-Election LGBTQIA+ Community Insights Report*.

Recommendations by Issue Area

The Commission's recommendations are organized alphabetically by issue area and reflect the diverse and complex challenges facing LGBTQIA+ Marylanders:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ● Access to LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Resources | ● Interpersonal Violence |
| ● Aging | ● Intersectionality |
| ● Athletics | ● Judicial System & Corrections |
| ● Bereavement | ● Lack of LGBTQIA+ Cultural Humility and Competency |
| ● Data | ● Law Enforcement and First Responders |
| ● Disability | ● LGBTQIA+ Organizations/ Pride Centers |
| ● Discrimination and Hate Crimes | ● Racial Justice |
| ● Employment and Economic Stability | ● Religious Freedom |
| ● Family Protections | ● Representation of LGBTQIA+ People in State Government |
| ● Food Security | ● Sanctuary Policies |
| ● Funding and Resource Allocation | ● Sex Work |
| ● Harm Reduction & Substance Use Programs | ● Socioeconomic Inequality |
| ● Healthcare (and Mental Healthcare) | ● Transportation |
| ● HIV prevention and Treatment Access | ● Veterans |
| ● Housing and Homelessness | ● Youth & Education |
| ● ID Documents | |
| ● Immigration | |

Recommendations and Best Practices for All State Agencies for LGBTQIA+ Inclusion

In the final section of the 2024 recommendations, the Commission published [General Recommendations and Best Practices for LGBTQIA+ Inclusion for all State Agencies](#). The Commission is eager to assist State agencies in implementation. A summary of the 2024 LGBTQIA+ Inclusion Symposium and progress is included in the following section. The eight recommendations are summarized below:

- 1. Inclusive Policies:** Ensure that all staff and members of the public are aware of the [State of Maryland's non-discrimination laws](#), and review and update internal and external policies, procedures, and guidelines to ensure LGBTQIA+ inclusion.
- 2. Training and Professional Development:** Require at least six hours of mandatory LGBTQIA+ cultural humility and competency training for new and existing State employees annually.
- 3. Programming and Events:** Recognize and celebrate LGBTQIA+ dates such as Pride Month, Transgender Day of Visibility, etc. through inclusive communications, programming, support groups, and events (e.g., as a Statewide LGBTQIA+ symposium).
- 4. Community Engagement:** Create regularly scheduled outreach opportunities to address concerns specific to LGBTQIA+ clients, especially historically excluded groups such as transgender, nonbinary, People of Color, and disabled LGBTQIA+ individuals.
- 5. External LGBTQIA+ Resources:** Create an LGBTQIA+ access plan to provide affirming and accessible resources and services to LGBTQIA+ Marylanders.
- 6. Staffing:** Each State agency should have funded and resourced positions to connect LGBTQIA+ individuals to State services.
- 7. Funding:** Allocate or advocate for a specified budget for LGBTQIA+ initiatives. This funding will cover staff salaries, training programs, community outreach, events, and other resources.
- 8. Data Collection:** Include questions about sexual orientation, gender identity, and sexual characteristics (SOGISC) in State surveys to better understand the challenges and needs of LGBTQIA+ communities.

Recommendations for Supporting LGBTQIA+ Students in Maryland Schools

In September 2023, the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs unanimously adopted its [*Recommendations for Supporting LGBTQIA+ Students in Maryland's K–12 Schools*](#). This publication was developed in direct response to both national and local challenges threatening the safety, dignity, and well-being of LGBTQIA+ youth in educational settings.

Drawing from recent Maryland-specific data and national studies, the report outlines the persistent barriers LGBTQIA+ students face, including elevated rates of bullying, harassment, exclusion, and mental health concerns. The report also identifies opportunities for State and local leadership to proactively protect and affirm LGBTQIA+ youth.

At a time when LGBTQIA+ students, particularly transgender and nonbinary youth, are being targeted by harmful legislation, rhetoric, and policy rollbacks across the country, Maryland must reaffirm its commitment to inclusion in public education. These recommendations offer a roadmap for safe, equitable, and affirming schools that serve *all* students, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation.

Summary of Recommendations:

1. **Statewide Protections for Gender-Expansive Students**

Develop and enact a statewide policy that protects transgender, nonbinary, and gender-expansive students from sex- and gender-based discrimination in schools. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has published guidelines to support and protect LGBTQIA+ students; however, the guidelines are not implemented uniformly across the State.

2. **Mandatory LGBTQIA+ Professional Development for Educators**

Require all public school educators to receive at least six (6) hours of live, annual professional development on the needs and experiences of LGBTQIA+ students and families. Training should be delivered by qualified facilitators with lived and professional experience.

3. **LGBTQIA+-Inclusive Curriculum**

Require an LGBTQIA+-inclusive curriculum to be taught as part of the State social studies and sexual education curriculum, and provide resources for developing LGBTQIA+-inclusive curricula for all other content areas and grade levels.

4. **Protect Access to Inclusive Educational Materials**

Outlaw discriminatory book bans in school libraries and classrooms that disproportionately target LGBTQIA+ voices and stories. The successful passage of the 2024 *Freedom to Read Act* helps prevent book bans that disproportionately target LGBTQIA+ authors, characters, and histories, ensuring that all students can see themselves reflected in what they read and learn.

5. **Support for GSAs and Peer-Led Inclusion Initiatives**
Provide funding and technical assistance to establish and grow Gender & Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) in all public schools and grade levels.
6. **Family and Caregiver Engagement**
Offer culturally responsive support and resources to help parents, families, and caregivers become affirming allies for LGBTQIA+ youth.
7. **Statewide Data Collection**
Collect and publish statewide data on LGBTQIA+ youth, including population demographics and experiences in public education systems.
8. **Dedicated Leadership at MSDE**
Establish a full-time team within the MSDE focused on LGBTQIA+ student achievement and systemic inclusion.
9. **Update to State Guidance Document on Transgender Youth**
Draft and release an updated version of the 2015 MSDE guidance, *Providing Safe Spaces for Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Youth*, in collaboration with a paid stakeholder workgroup that includes students, families, and community leaders. In late 2024, MSDE published the following updated guidance:
 - a. [Safe and Supportive Schools for All Students: Creating Inclusive Spaces for LGBTQIA+ Youth](#)
 - b. [Non-Discrimination Guidelines for Transgender and Non-Conforming Youth](#)

Section 4

2024 Legislative Session Overview

2024 Legislative Session Overview

The 2024 legislative session marked continued progress in strengthening legal protections and public policy in support of LGBTQIA+ Marylanders. While several transformative bills advanced, others stalled despite widespread advocacy and strong community support. Overall, the session reflected both momentum and missed opportunities for equity.



Photo courtesy of the Office of the Governor: SB119 bill signing ceremony.

Several Commission priority bills were successfully enacted, including:

- **✓ SB119 – Gender-Affirming Care Protections:** This legislation places gender-affirming treatment under Maryland’s “legally protected care” framework, ensuring that patients and providers in Maryland are shielded from out-of-state legal actions or data-sharing mandates. It builds on Governor Moore’s 2023 [executive order](#) and is particularly important as many other states enact hostile laws targeting trans people and their healthcare providers.
- **✓ HB 602 – Employment Discrimination – Sexual Orientation:** Championed by Speaker Adrienne Jones as part of the “Decency Agenda,” this bill strengthened Maryland’s employment nondiscrimination laws by explicitly prohibiting differential treatment based on sexual orientation. Its passage contributed to Maryland’s upgraded score on the Movement Advancement Project’s (MAP) national LGBTQ+ policy index, moving the state from “medium” to “high” in the sexual orientation policy category.
- **✓ HB1397– Equal Opportunity for All Marylanders Act:** Similar to HB 602, but more broad, this legislation modernizes Maryland’s nondiscrimination laws by explicitly adding

protected characteristics, including “sex characteristics,” to the state’s Human Relations law. The bill strengthens civil rights protections in employment, housing, and public accommodations, ensuring legal recourse for LGBTQIA+ individuals who face discrimination.

- **✓HB785/✓SB738 – Freedom to Read Act:** In response to rising efforts to ban LGBTQIA+ books, this legislation protects access to diverse books in public schools and libraries by prohibiting the removal of materials based on partisan, ideological, or religious objections. Requires state-funded libraries to adopt written policies affirming intellectual freedom and protects staff from retaliation for following these standards.
- **✓HB0127 – Nonoccupational Postexposure Prophylaxis (nPEP) Standing Order Program:** Expands access to nPEP, a critical HIV prevention tool, through a statewide standing order to enhance Maryland’s public health infrastructure and affirming support for evidence-based HIV prevention.
- **✓SB0134 – Correctional Ombudsman – Establishment and Funding:** This bill creates an independent Correctional Ombudsman Office within the Office of the Attorney General to investigate complaints and improve oversight of Maryland’s correctional institutions. The Commission supported this bill to ensure better protections for LGBTQIA+ incarcerated individuals, especially transgender people, who are at heightened risk of abuse and neglect in detention settings.
- **✓HB 577/✓SB 1107 – Study on the Establishment of a Homeless Shelter Licensing Program:** This legislation directs the Department of Housing and Community Development to study the need for a licensing framework for homeless shelters in Maryland. With LGBTQIA+ individuals, especially youth and transgender people, disproportionately experiencing homelessness, the Commission supported this bill as a step toward ensuring safe, affirming, and accountable shelter environments statewide.

These wins helped bolster Maryland’s overall score on the [Movement Advancement Project’s \(MAP\) LGBTQ+ Policy Tally](#), placing the state 7th nationally for comprehensive LGBTQIA+ protections. Following the legislative session in May 2024, Maryland increased its score to 39.5 out of 44.5, just behind states like California and Colorado.

However, several high-priority bills failed to advance:

- **✗HB485/✗SB1165 Public Health - Prohibition on Transfer of Human Immunodeficiency Virus - Repeal:** This bill aimed to modernize outdated, stigmatizing public health laws. The bills failed to progress, maintaining Maryland’s standing statute criminalizing HIV transmission, which is a barrier to achieving full health equity.
- **✗HB558 – Comprehensive Health Education Framework:** This bill would have established LGBTQIA+-inclusive health education standards statewide. Its failure highlights an area identified by MAP as a gap in Maryland’s overall LGBTQ+ protections.

- **~~X~~HB 50 – Commission on History, Culture, and Civics in Education:** This bill proposed establishing a State commission to advise the Maryland State Board of Education on enhancing K–12 instruction in U.S. and Maryland history, culture, and civics. The commission aimed to ensure educational standards reflect the contributions of historically underrepresented communities, including LGBTQIA+ individuals.

At the same time, the General Assembly successfully blocked a slate of harmful proposals that sought to roll back LGBTQIA+ inclusion. These bills were soundly defeated thanks to coordinated advocacy from the LGBTQ+ Legislative Caucus, allied legislators, LGBTQIA+ organizations, and impacted communities.

- **~~X~~HB 25** - Public Schools - Sexually Explicit Materials - Prohibited in Libraries and Media Centers
- **~~X~~HB 47/~~X~~SB 381** - Education - Interscholastic and Intramural Junior Varsity and Varsity Teams - Designation Based on Sex (Fairness In Girls' Sports Act)
- **~~X~~HB 722-** Health - Minors - Gender and Sex Transition Procedures
- **~~X~~HB 65** - Public Schools - Medical and Psychological Treatment in School-Based Health
- **~~X~~HB 553/~~X~~SB 438** - Family Law - Fundamental Parental Rights
- **~~X~~HB 1430-** Education - Public Schools - Parents' Rights (Education Bill of Rights for Families Act)
- **~~X~~HB 671/~~X~~SB 355** - Criminal Law - Display of Obscene Material to Minors - Prohibition

These bills were soundly defeated thanks to coordinated advocacy from LGBTQIA+ organizations, allied legislators, and impacted communities.

In summary, the 2024 legislative session delivered meaningful wins and affirmed Maryland's leadership in LGBTQIA+ policy, but also made clear that more work remains. The Commission remains committed to supporting pro-equity legislation, amplifying community voices, and ensuring LGBTQIA+ Marylanders are protected in every aspect of life: from health to housing, from education to employment.

2025 Legislative Session Highlights

The 2025 legislative session marked important progress, challenges, and renewed calls for action on behalf of Maryland's LGBTQIA+ communities. The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs actively engaged with legislators, submitted testimony on more than 30 bills, and worked alongside advocates and community partners to protect and expand equity and inclusion.

Among the highlights, Maryland became the **fifth state to repeal its outdated HIV criminalization law**, with the passage of the **Carlton R. Smith Act (HB0039/SB0356)**, a major step forward for evidence-based public health policy and dignity for people living with HIV. Named in honor of the late Carlton R. Smith, a beloved advocate and community leader who dedicated his life to advancing LGBTQIA+ rights and ending HIV stigma. The bills were signed into law by Governor Moore on May 20, 2025 and stands as a testament to his enduring legacy.



Photo: February 6, 2024, following the House hearing on the HB485 to modernize HIV laws. From left to right: House bill sponsor Delegate Kris Fair, Jessica Emerson, Carlton R. Smith, Melanie Reese, Camila Reynolds-Dominguez, Lee Blinder, Jeremy Browning, and Philip Westry.

Additionally, the General Assembly passed **HB161**, establishing a statewide **Comprehensive Health Education Framework**, though with harmful amendments requiring an “opt out” for sexual orientation and gender identity.

Unfortunately, several important bills, including the only trans-specific bill, the **Birth Certificate Modernization Act (HB1368/SB0314)**, did not advance. Several anti-LGBTQIA+ proposals again surfaced but were defeated, including bills that would have limited access to gender-affirming care for minors, undermined inclusive curricula, and advanced so-called “parents’ rights” efforts to censor public education.

As in previous years, the Commission centered the voices of LGBTQIA+ Marylanders and advocated for intersectional, data-driven policymaking. A full overview of the 2025 session, including priority bill summaries, will be included in the Commission’s 2025 Annual Report.

Section 5

State Agency Data on LGBTQIA+ Inclusion and Discrimination Complaints

Overview

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs is mandated to collect data from State agencies regarding (1) the implementation of LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies and (2) complaints alleging discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. This section summarizes key findings from State agencies and provides an overview of progress and gaps in inclusion, as informed by the *Decade of Data* meta-analysis, the 2024 LGBTQIA+ Inclusion Symposium, and annual State agency reports.

Implementation of LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Policies at Maryland State Agencies

LGBTQIA+ Inclusion Symposium

The Commission hosted its **first-ever Statewide LGBTQIA+ Inclusion Symposium** held on October 24, 2024 at the Maryland State House. Over 40 State agencies participated, reviewed Commission recommendations and best practices, shared progress through case studies, built connections, and networked. The event equipped State agency leaders with the knowledge and tools necessary to foster inclusive environments for LGBTQIA+ employees and constituents.



Photo courtesy of the Office of the Governor: State agency leaders with commissioners and staff in the Governor's Reception Room following the symposium.

LGBTQIA+ Inclusion Case Studies

Progress Across State Agencies LGBTQIA+ Inclusion

The following case studies, presented at the 2024 LGBTQIA+ Inclusion Symposium and summarized below, illustrate meaningful actions taken by Maryland State agencies to advance LGBTQIA+ inclusion. While not an exhaustive list, these examples reflect the creativity, leadership, and commitment emerging across State government to build a more inclusive and affirming Maryland.

Department of Veterans and Military Families (DVMF)



Focus: Implementation of the 2022 Restoration of Honor Act

Summary: DVMF established a streamlined process to restore State-based benefits for LGBTQ+ veterans discharged under discriminatory policies. They also partnered with the University of Baltimore's Veterans Advocacy Clinic to support federal discharge upgrades. The process included new regulations, a dedicated web page, and accessible legal resources.

Key Outcome: A responsive and affirming system for restoring dignity and access to benefits for LGBTQ+ veterans.

Department of Natural Resources (DNR)



Focus: Internal culture shift and DEIJA integration

Summary: DNR created a DEIJA Affinity Team and an LGBTQIA+ Employee Resource Group (ERG). Unit-level DEIJA plans, visibility campaigns, Pride participation, and inclusive signage in State parks have helped foster internal belonging and external access.

Key Outcome: Culture change driven by staff-led initiatives, now supported at the leadership level.

Department of Aging (MDOA)



Focus: Support for LGBTQIA+ elders

Summary: MDOA launched a dedicated webpage for LGBTQIA+ elders and mandated staff-wide SAGECare cultural competency training. They earned a national credential for LGBTQIA+ inclusion in aging services.

Key Outcome: A more affirming environment for LGBTQIA+ older adults and recognition of their unique needs.

Maryland Department of Health – Medicaid (MDH)



Focus: Implementation of the Trans Health Equity Act (THEA)

Summary: MDH expanded Medicaid coverage for gender-affirming care. Using a three-phase rollout, the department developed communications, policies, and a provider network. Staff collaborated with the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs to address gaps in access to services.

Key Outcome: Comprehensive, Statewide implementation of expanded care for transgender and gender-diverse Medicaid recipients.

Maryland Department of Health – Behavioral Health Administration



Focus: Suicide prevention and youth support

Summary: Maryland partnered with The Trevor Project to become the first State to launch a Train-the-Trainer program on LGBTQIA+ youth mental health. Certified trainers now deliver the ALLY and CARE curricula to schools Statewide.

Key Outcome: Free, evidence-based training on LGBTQIA+ youth well-being is now available to all educators, administrators, and the public..

Department of Information Technology (DoIT)



Focus: Internal hiring practices and inclusive culture

Summary: DoIT developed equitable hiring protocols, encouraged inclusive communication, and participated in LGBTQIA+ STEM events like Queercon and Grace Hopper. Internal diversity events and ERG support are underway.

Key Outcome: Proactive and intersectional approach to workforce inclusion in the tech sector.

Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM)



Focus: Equity integration in emergency preparedness

Summary: MDEM established the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI), embedded LGBTQIA+ considerations in training and planning, and launched a DEI newsletter. Leadership commitment has helped operationalize inclusion in emergency management.

Key Outcome: Structural integration of DEI into emergency management systems and training.

Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD)



Focus: Equal access in homeless services

Summary: DHCD updated grant language, shelter policy, and intake procedures to ensure LGBTQIA+ inclusion, particularly for youth. It also supported capacity-building for LGBTQIA+ organizations and internal equity planning.

Key Outcome: Stronger protections and more inclusive systems for LGBTQIA+ Marylanders experiencing homelessness.

Assessment of State Data Related to Complaints Alleging Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs partnered with the University of Maryland's iConsultancy Program to analyze a decade of data from key State agencies. This section summarizes those findings and highlights progress, concerns, and opportunities for State-level improvement. Find the full report: [*A Decade of Data: Meta-Analysis and Insights on the Experiences of LGBTQIA+ People in Maryland.*](#)

Annual Statewide Equal Employment Opportunity Report (2013-2023)



The Maryland Department of Budget and Management publishes the Annual Statewide Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) report prepared by the Office of the Statewide EEO Coordinator (OSEEOC). OSEEOC is charged with administering and enforcing the State's EEO Program in accordance with the State's equal employment and non-discrimination laws.

The State of Maryland is an equal opportunity employer and prohibits discrimination in any personnel action concerning any employee or job applicant for employment based on age; ancestry; color; creed; genetic information; gender identity and expression; marital status; mental or physical disability; national origin; race; religious affiliation, belief, or opinion; sex; or sexual orientation.

Submit complaint and view reports to the Office of the Statewide Equal Employment Opportunity Coordinator online at: <https://dbm.maryland.gov/eoo/pages/eeohome.aspx>

Findings from the meta-analysis reveal:

- Complaints based on **sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI)** made up a small but consistent percentage of total EEO complaints filed across agencies.
- A **notable increase** in complaints was recorded in the years following high-profile national events or policy debates (e.g., marriage equality, bathroom legislation).
- Many agencies lacked disaggregated data on gender identity, making it difficult to fully assess the extent of anti-transgender bias in State employment.

Recommendations: The report recommended improved training, consistent reporting across agencies, and inclusion of voluntary self-identification options to better track SOGI discrimination.

State of Maryland Hate Bias Report (2013-2023)



The Maryland Department of State Police (MDSP) in partnership with the Maryland Coordination & Analysis Center, publishes the State of Maryland Hate Bias Report annually. The report includes data from law enforcement agencies within the State of Maryland and the Office of the State Fire Marshal on actions/comments seemingly directed against an individual or group

because of race, color, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender, disability, national origin, or homelessness.

Findings from the meta-analysis reveal:

- Hate crimes motivated by **sexual orientation** consistently ranked among the top three categories reported, following race and religion.
- **Gender identity-motivated hate crimes**, while less frequently reported, showed a steady rise over the past decade, especially after 2020.
- Many law enforcement agencies across the State failed to submit consistent hate bias reports, creating data gaps.

Recommendations: The analysis recommends mandatory reporting compliance, bias training for officers, and improved outreach to LGBTQIA+ victims of hate crimes.

Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (2013-2023)



The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (MCCR) is charged with enforcing Maryland's anti-discrimination laws in employment, housing, public accommodations, and State contracts; providing educational outreach services related to provisions of these laws; and promoting and improving civil rights in Maryland.

File a Complaint with MCCR - If you believe you have been a victim of discrimination, you are encouraged to visit the MCCR website to submit a complaint:

<https://mccr.maryland.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

Over the past decade, MCCR recorded:

- More than **250 complaints** directly citing SOGI discrimination, with the majority related to **employment and public accommodations**.
- A significant portion of cases involved **intersectional discrimination**, including race, disability, and gender.
- The data highlighted a need for stronger outreach to LGBTQIA+ communities to raise awareness about legal protections and filing processes.

Recommendations: The analysis concluded that expanded training and a targeted communications strategy could enhance the agency’s ability to support LGBTQIA+ Marylanders.

Maryland Public School Bullying Meta-Analysis (2013–2023)

This meta-analysis examined a decade of bullying, harassment, and intimidation data reported by Maryland State Department of Education in Maryland public schools, with a focus on incidents linked to sexual orientation and gender identity. Findings included:

- **Consistent Underreporting:** The number of reported incidents related to sexual orientation or gender identity was relatively low and inconsistent year-to-year, suggesting underreporting due to fear of retaliation, lack of trust in school staff, or the normalization of anti-LGBTQIA+ bullying.
- **Lack of Uniform Data Collection:** Definitions and categorizations of bullying types varied between districts, making Statewide comparisons difficult.
- **High Impact on LGBTQIA+ Youth:** Despite limited data, national trends and anecdotal evidence suggest LGBTQIA+ youth face disproportionately high rates of bullying and harassment in Maryland schools.
- **Intersectionality Matters:** Youth at the intersection of marginalized identities—such as LGBTQIA+ students of color or those with disabilities—faced compounded risks of bullying and exclusion.

Recommendations included standardized Statewide reporting procedures, training for school personnel on LGBTQIA+ inclusion, and increased student engagement to improve reporting and response.



Youth Risk Behavior Survey/Youth Tobacco Survey (YRBS/YTS) Meta-Analysis (2013–2023)

This analysis reviewed YRBS/YTS data collected over the past decade and published by the Maryland Department of Health to better understand how LGBTQIA+ youth in Maryland experience risk factors such as substance use, mental health issues, and violence. Key findings include:

- **Mental Health Disparities:** LGBTQIA+ youth consistently reported higher rates of depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts compared to their non-LGBTQIA+ peers.
- **Substance Use:** LGBTQIA+ students reported higher rates of tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drug use—often linked to stress, rejection, or trauma.
- **Violence and Safety Concerns:** LGBTQIA+ youth were more likely to report feeling unsafe at school, being threatened or injured, and experiencing dating violence.
- **Need for Disaggregated Data:** Many counties either did not collect or did not publish data specific to LGBTQIA+ youth, limiting effective analysis and intervention planning.

Recommendations included mandating standardized LGBTQIA+ demographic data collection, ensuring anonymity to protect students, increasing mental health supports in schools, and funding targeted prevention efforts for high-risk youth populations.



Section 6

2024 Events & Outreach

2024 Events & Outreach

The Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs commissioners and staff participated in over 45 events to celebrate our progress, advocate for inclusive policies, and engage LGBTQIA+ and allied communities throughout the State. Additionally, commissioners and staff attended numerous meetings, conferences, and forums to assess and share community needs, and acknowledge LGBTQIA+ days of significance.

The Commission has the privilege and honor of recognizing outstanding work from advocates and organizations with proclamations and citations on behalf of the Governor. Community members and organizations can [request a proclamation or citation](#) at least 30 days before the date needed.

Events and Outreach Highlights

February 2, 2024 - State House Tour with Commissioners - Annapolis, Anne Arundel County

February 5, 2024 - Annapolis Pride Legislative Reception - Annapolis, Anne Arundel County



Photo: Annapolis Pride board member Jayne Walters speaks to legislators, advocates, and allies.

March 2, 2024 - Gender-Affirming Care Informational Session hosted by Baltimore Safe Haven - Baltimore City



Photo: Founder and Executive Director of Baltimore Safe Haven Iya Dammons welcomes attendees.

March 12, 2024 - Governor's Office of Community Initiatives Legislative Night - Annapolis, Anne Arundel County

March 29, 2024 - Unveiling Voices - Trans Day of Visibility Gala Awards hosted by Heart to Hand Inc. - North Englewood, Prince George's County



Photo courtesy of Heart to Hand Inc: Commission Chair Lee Blinder and Director Jeremy Browning present the Transdender Day of Visibility Proclamation to event organizer Kaniya Walker.

March 31, 2023 - International Transgender Day of Visibility Celebration hosted by Howard County Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs - Columbia, Howard County



Photo: Performers take the stage at Bus Boys & Poets.

May 17, 2024 - 26th Annual Lavender Graduation - College Park, Prince Georges County

May 18, 2024 - Charles County Pride Festival - White Plains, Charles County

June 1, 2024 - Annapolis Pride Parade & Festival - Annapolis, Anne Arundel County



Photo courtesy of the Executive Office of the Governor: Commissioners with Governor Moore before the Annapolis Pride Parade

June 1, 2024 - Caroline County Pride - Denton, Caroline County



Photo courtesy of the Office of the Governor: Lt. Governor Aruna Miller addresses festival goers.

June 1, 2024 - Sykesville Pride - Sykesville, Carroll County

June 2, 2024 - Pride Walk - National Harbor, Prince Georges County

June 9, 2024 - Takoma Park Pride - Takoma Park, Montgomery County

June 10, 2024 - Embrace Diversity: PG County LGBTQIA+ Pride Month Event - Prince George's County

June 12, 2024 - Pride is Universal - National Harbor, Prince George's County

June 14, 2024 - Twilight on the Terrace - Baltimore City

June 15, 2024 - Emerald City Pride Parade and Festival - Greenbelt, Prince Georges County

June 15, 2024 - Mount Rainier Pride Day - Mount Rainier, Prince Georges County

June 15, 2024 - Catonsville Pride - Catonsville, Baltimore County

June 15, 2024 - Garrett County Pride - *Garrett County*



June 15, 2024 - Baltimore Pride Parade - *Baltimore City*

June 15, 2024 - Delmarva Pride Festival - *Easton, Talbot County*

June 22, 2024 - Frederick Pride - *Frederick, Frederick County*



Photo courtesy of the Office of the Governor: Frederick Pride staff, volunteers, commissioners, and festival attendees with Governor Moore

June 27, 2024 - Orioles Pride Night - Baltimore City

June 29, 2024 - Baltimore Trans Pride hosted by Baltimore Safe Haven - Baltimore City



Photo: Iya Dammons honored by the City of Baltimore with the naming of Iya Dammons Way during the Baltimore Trans Pride celebration.

June 29, 2024 - Annapolis Parks and Recs Pool Grand Opening (with gender-inclusive facilities) - Annapolis, Anne Arundel County

June 29, 2024 - Crofton Pride Parade & Festival, Crofton, Anne Arundel County

June 29, 2024 - Salisbury Pride Parade and Festival - Salisbury, Wicomico County



Photo courtesy of Salisbury Pride: Attendees watch live performances at the festival in Downtown Salisbury.

June 30, 2024 - Cumberland Pride - Cumberland, Allegany County



Photo: Cumberland Pride march to the festival grounds in Downtown Cumberland.

June 30, 2024 - Pride in the Plaza - Silver Spring, Montgomery County



Photo: Attendees celebrate with live performances and speakers.

July 13, 2024 - Hagerstown Pride - Hagerstown, Washington County

July 13, 2024 - Westminster Pride - Westminster, Carroll County



Photo: Hundreds of festival attendees line the streets in Downtown Westminster.

August 27, 2024 - University of Maryland Quelcome hosted by the UMD LGBTQ+ Equity Center - College Park, Maryland

September 7, 2024 - Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs Strategic Planning Retreat - Crownsville, Anne Arundel County

September 18, 2024 - Maryland Recreation and Parks Association 2SLGBTQIA+ Summit hosted by the Maryland Recreation and Parks Association - Annapolis, Anne Arundel County



Photo: Commissioners Sarah Stern and Joe Toolan discuss Two Spirit, Queer and Indigenous Inclusion.

October 5, 2024 - Upper Chesapeake Bay Pride - Havre De Grace, Harford County



Photo: Bailey Anne Kennedy, Miss Maryland USA 2024, gives the keynote address.

October 12, 2024 - Laurel Pride Day - Laurel, Prince George's County

October 12, 2024 - Salisbury Crosswalk Repainting hosted by PFLAG Salisbury - Salisbury, Wicomico County



Photo: Volunteers repaint the crosswalks in front of Salisbury City Hall. Salisbury is the first city in Maryland to install Pride and Trans Pride crosswalks which are now slated for removal by the current Salisbury mayor.

October 13, 2024 - Pride SoMD (Southern Maryland) - Lexington Manor Park, St. Mary's County



Photo: Pride SoMD Board Chair Tammy Gladstone welcomes attendees.

October 13, 2024 - Howard County Pride Festival - Columbia, Howard County

October 15, 2024 - White House Roundtable: Conversation on Aging and Loneliness in the LGBTQIA+ Community - Washington, DC

October 19, 2024 - Delmarva LGBTQ+ Health Fair - Easton, Talbot County

October 24, 2024 - LGBTQIA+ Inclusion Symposium - Annapolis, Anne Arundel County



Photo courtesy of the Governor's Office: Lt. Governor Aruna Miller addresses symposium attendees.

December 3, 2024 - SAGE Elders Housing Town Hall - Baltimore City

December 6, 2024 - Victory Fund 2024 International LGBTQ+ Leaders Conference - Washington, DC



Photo: Panel discussion on intersex inclusion.

December 13, 2024 - White House Roundtable: Conversation on Aging and Loneliness in the LGBTQIA+ Community (Follow-up meeting) - Washington, D.C.

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