

Written Testimony of Chad Griffin, President of the Human Rights Campaign,
in Support of Senate Bill 449: Fairness for All Marylanders Act to
The Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 26, 2013

Chair Frosh and Members of the Committee:

My name is Chad Griffin, and I am the President of the Human Rights Campaign, America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) equality. By inspiring and engaging all Americans, HRC strives to end discrimination against LGBT citizens and realize a nation that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all. On behalf of our over one million members and supporters nationwide, including more than 39,000 in Maryland, I am honored to submit this statement in support of Senate Bill 449, the Fairness for All Marylanders Act, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender identity.

Maryland has a proud history of being a leader on LGBT civil rights, including providing marriage equality and non-discrimination protections for gay, lesbian, and bisexual people. Extending those provisions to transgender people is a critical piece of civil rights protections that remains outstanding, and Senate Bill 449 would rectify this gap.

Anti-discrimination laws send a strong message that all of Maryland's residents matter. In a report HRC conducted last year, we found that 92% of LGBT youth say they hear negative messages about being LGBT, and six of ten LGBT youth report hearing negative messages about being LGBT from their elected leaders. More than four in ten LGBT youth state that their state government is not accepting of LGBT people, and 63% of LGBT youth say they will need to move from where they currently live in order to feel accepted. Maryland can't afford to lose young talent because young people feel unwelcome or are unprotected by state law. Today it is time to protect the most vulnerable among us by extending civil rights protections to cover gender identity.

Discrimination against transgender and gender non-conforming individuals continues to be a very real problem. As part of my role at HRC, I travel the country speaking to members of the LGBT community. I have heard far too many stories of transgender people who have lost their livelihoods simply because of some combination of an employer's fear and ignorance. Some are highly skilled professionals who, though seemingly irreplaceable in their positions, suddenly become expendable when they announce the intent to live as the people they truly are. Others are accounts of people forced into whatever jobs they can find, scraping together money for the tremendous medical costs of gender transition, which are rarely covered by health insurance. They are stories of people in every walk of life – doctors and lawyers, plumbers and bus drivers. Many are also stories of parents and spouses, whose efforts to find secure, fulfilling employment are also a struggle to provide for their families. The time has long since passed when we as a nation ought to tolerate arbitrary discrimination against any group of people. I cannot overstate the real-life implications of this bill for Marylanders.

That any hardworking transgender Marylander should be denied the ability to contribute to the economy and support his or her family is simply unacceptable.

In addition to guaranteeing a level playing field in employment, Senate Bill 449 would ensure that housing opportunities and access to public accommodation are made available to all. It is well-documented that transgender and gender non-conforming individuals are shown less desirable properties for purchase or rent, receive less favorable customer service, or encounter outright refusal of service. This bill does not prevent employers from firing incompetent employees nor does it prevent landlords from turning down unqualified renters. Instead, this bill simply ensures that all employees get a fair chance at working hard to get ahead without discrimination or bias and that no one is singled out for arbitrary discrimination when it comes to areas like housing, employment, and public accommodations.

Passage of SB 449 would rectify what is a significant lack of civil rights protections for Marylanders, and would put Maryland in good company. Beginning with an ordinance passed in Minneapolis in 1975, 16 states, the District of Columbia, and more than 166 cities and counties – including Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Howard County, and Montgomery County – have enacted laws prohibiting discrimination based on gender identity. The majority of Fortune 500 companies have voluntarily adopted policies that prohibit discrimination based on gender identity. Addressing discrimination on the basis of gender identity is not new for the State of Maryland, either: Maryland includes gender identity as a category protected under the hate crimes law and anti-bullying law.

The time has come for Maryland to finally act and ensure that discrimination has no place in this great state. Please vote in favor of Senate Bill 449.