

# **Testimony of Robert F. Ford, Jr.**

## **Howard County Council**

**November 21, 2016**

I am Robert Ford, 5912 Trotter Rd. Clarksville, MD 21029. Thank you members of the Howard County Council for the opportunity to testify on my behalf regarding my appointment to the Howard County Human Rights Commission.

All my life I have passionately believed in the importance of civil rights. It seems like such a simple concept that people should be treated equally no matter their race, religion, gender, nationality, sexual orientation and gender identity. But history has taught us that these rights have to be fought for and defended against those who see minorities as inferior and not worthy of equal rights under the law.

My personal mission has been to advance the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender members of our society. Since the early 1980's when I worked with the LGBT Community Center of Baltimore to more recently with Howard County PFLAG, I have been witness to and have been actively involved in a number of hard-fought victories.

I came out at a relatively late age because until then I was fearful of losing my job and risking ostracism from family members, co-workers and neighbors.

It had been a difficult time for me personally, and I have felt much more confident and accepting of my sexual orientation after meeting and then eventually marrying my husband. Proudly, we've been together nearly 37 years.

While we have made considerable progress, LGBT individuals are still vulnerable to discrimination, hatred and violence. Young LGBT people are most vulnerable at home, in school and online. Life is challenging as it is. I don't want these youth to have to struggle with their sexuality or gender identity as I had to.

I am extremely proud that Howard County has been forward-thinking on human rights for over 40 years. However, this county, despite its progressive record, is not immune to bias. Even today we see that there is hatred and discrimination around our nation and the world directed not only towards LGBT people but to all minorities.

I want to do my part in making sure our citizens are treated with the respect they deserve, no matter who they are and who they love. Thank you for your consideration.