

Testimony of Joshua Kaufman in Favor of Council Resolution 119-2019.

Greeting Chairperson and Members of the Howard County Council. I want to thank you this evening for considering my nomination to be a member of the Howard County Human Rights Commission. I also want to thank County Executive Calvin Ball for his confidence in my ability to serve the citizens of Howard County.

My name is Josh Kaufman. I have been a resident of Howard County since 1995, having lived in Harpers Choice, Long Reach and since 2005, in Elkridge. From the day I moved here, it was clear that Howard County has a well-earned reputation as a community that values diversity and seeks to support the rights of every individual that lives, studies or works here. Rather than a fortunate accident, this has been the result of a deliberate effort on the part of the County Government and the wider community for decades. However, events here the County over the last few years have shown that there is more work to be done, and that we are far from immune from the disturbing human rights abuses that are occurring across the country.

I am very excited about this opportunity as it combines two of my great passions – advancing human rights and inclusion, and serving my community. I am currently a senior manager at the United States Agency for International Development. For most of my 23-year career, I served as a Democracy, Human Rights and Governance Officer. In that capacity, I was privileged to have served the American people by advancing human rights overseas, including by providing support to human rights commissions. I was also one of the principle authors of USAID's current Human Rights Strategy. As a senior manager in the Federal Government, I am also a strong champion for inclusive hiring and professional development, and I am very familiar with relevant federal regulations related to EEOC and similar issues, all of which have county equivalents.

I am also someone who cares deeply about my community and the idea of helping to make Howard County a better place for all, especially for those that are marginalized or otherwise at risk of not being allowed to live up to their full potential due to their gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, age, religion or sexual identity. I have ample experience serving on multiple Howard County Government boards and commissions, such as the Ethics Commission, the Recreation and Parks Advisory Board, the Spending Affordability Committee and the County Council's School Budget Committee. I am also a past Member and Chair of the Howard County Board of Education, where I was a leading voice for the rights of our students and staff. For example, I led a successful effort to make health insurance and other familial benefits available to same sex domestic partners of our employees years before the legalization of same sex marriage in Maryland. I was also helped lead an effort to reform the school system's policies on religious practice to protect the rights of religious minorities, both students and staff.

Thank you again for your consideration of my nomination to be a member of the Howard County Human Rights Commission. I am willing and able to answer any questions you may have.