



HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATION

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Lonnie R. Robbins, Chief Administrative Officer

Voice/Relay

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Subject: Written Testimony regarding the creation of the LGBTQIA+ Commission

To: Lonnie R. Robbins,
Chief Administrative Officer

From: Yolanda F. Sonnier, Administrator *YFS*
Office of Human Rights and Equity

Date: June 16, 2022

The Office of Human Rights and Equity (OHRE) is in support of the creation of the LGBTQIA+ Commission which will be contained in the Howard County Code, Section 12.218.

County Executive Ball created the LGBTQ+ Workgroup on November 1, 2019 recognizing that members of the LGBTQ+ community have historically been targeted and discriminated against based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and that more work was needed to move towards a more inclusive community. The workgroup was to identify best practices and strategies to protect, promote and affirm members of the LGBTQ+ community.

The workgroup was fortunate to have dedicated community members who examined issues relating to the LGBTQ+ community during the eighteen (18) months the workgroup was active. The workgroup issued its final report in March 2021 providing recommendations to the County Executive. One of the recommendations was to establish the workgroup as a permanent commission in Howard County Government.

For further inclusion, it is recommended to make the name the “LGBTQIA+ Commission” which includes those identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and the + represents members of the community who identify with a sexual orientation or gender identity that isn’t included within the LGBTQIA acronym.

Establishing this body as a commission will ensure there is consistent representation to advance opportunities and protections for members of the LGBTQIA+ community in Howard County and to work in partnership with County leadership, departments and the community at large to reduce systemic inequities.

In Howard County, where we are proud of our diversity, we must continue to strive to ensure all our residents are included, have access to services, feel welcomed, protected, and have equitable opportunities. The establishment of this commission will not only ensure empowerment and education to the LGBTQIA community but will improve our entire county.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The 1st year of this Commission will probably be setting priorities, examining continuing community needs and establishing the plan for outreach, events, trainings and other programming. Any expenses of the commission in FY23 will be covered by OHRE’s budget. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email, ysonnier@howardcountymd.gov or by phone at 410-313-6430.