

Dear LGBTQIA+ Commissioners,

I'm Samantha Magness (she/her), and I'm applying for the teen Commissioner position to help support the LGBTQIA+ community in Howard County. I'm a 16-year-old bisexual girl, and I care that teens like me, my friends, and adults feel supported in our community.

In eighth grade, I began questioning my sexuality and wondered if I might have feelings for a girl. I felt very confused because my friends and family were encouraging me to like boys. Unfortunately, the community I lived in and my former school were not supportive of LGBTQIA+ individuals, they even sent my sister home for mentioning "transgender." I felt like I had to hide my true self at school. Despite my confusion, I reached out to one of my teachers by typing my feelings and showing her my screen, but she encouraged me to keep it a secret. It was even more confusing when my mom insisted that I could only have romantic feelings for guys. Feeling overwhelmed by the pressure and opinions of those around me, I decided to let it go and be straight.

When I was in tenth grade at Mount Hebron, my American Government teachers were talking about Valentine's Day, and I was trying to think about the boy I had a crush on. But then I realized my true special someone was a girl, not the boy. The confusion resurfaced, and I sought support from student services to discuss my feelings. My mom was again telling me I was confused, but I persisted in advocating for myself, especially in the more supportive environment of Mount Hebron. I finally found the courage to tell the girl at school that I liked her, and we eventually became girlfriends. My mom has since become supportive of me as a bisexual teen.

My goals as a Commissioner would be to help organize community events and advocate for education on LGBTQIA+ topics. I believe in safe spaces where LGBTQIA+ individuals can feel supported and share their experiences. My experiences during Pride Month in Howard County made me want to apply for this position. The OEC Pride Festival, with its music, vendor booths, flags, and acceptance of individual expressions, was a memorable experience. Pride Prom was heartwarming as friends dressed freely, without conforming to traditional gender norms. Seeing same-sex couples dancing happily made my heart happy and it was because of the advocacy efforts in Howard County.

I have always been an advocate for the LGBTQIA+ community. Educating people is essential to overcome fear and misunderstanding. I'm ready to use my voice to help the community.

Please ask if you have any questions about my ideas.

Sincerely,

Samantha Magness (she/her)