



2526 SAINT PAUL STREET  
BALTIMORE, MD 21218  
TEL (410) 625-LGBT (5428)  
FAX (410) 625-7423  
www.freestate-justice.org

**Bill:** HB206  
**Title:** Unaccompanied Minors in Need of Shelter and Supportive Services  
**Date:** January 28, 2020  
**Committee:** House Appropriations Committee  
**Position:** Support

To the Honorable Maggie McIntosh and Esteemed Members of the Committee:

FreeState Justice is a statewide legal advocacy organization that seeks to improve the lives of low-income lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (“LGBTQ”) Marylanders. We work across Maryland to provide free civil legal aid to LGBTQ Marylanders with low incomes who are facing discrimination.

FreeState Justice whole heartedly supports HB206, which establishes that unaccompanied minors who are experiencing homelessness have legal capacity to consent to admission to sheltering programs registered with the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development.

Based on national studies, 5% to 10% of youth identify as LGBT.<sup>1</sup> However, the disproportionate numbers of LGBT youth who experience homelessness in Maryland alone, demonstrate the strong need for safe spaces like emergency shelters. Of the estimated 2,425 youth who go to sleep without a stable living situation, or the support of a family member/guardian, 40% identify as LGBT.<sup>2</sup> LGBT homeless youth face greater risk factors leaving them vulnerable to exploitation, dangerous and unstable living situations, school drop-out, human trafficking, and to violence. These risk factors in turn lead to higher incidences of justice system involvement, unemployment, and health problems. HB 206 will create more emergency shelter options for youth, giving them the necessary resources to become self-sufficient and achieve their goals.

<sup>1</sup> Youth Equality Alliance, *Living in the Margins, A Report on the Challenges of LGBTQ Youth in Maryland Education, Foster Care, and Juvenile Justice Systems (2014)*.

<sup>2</sup> Miller, A., Unick, J., & Harburger, D.S. (2017). Maryland Youth Count 2017: A report on the findings from Youth REACH MD’s second survey of unaccompanied youth & young adults experiencing homelessness. Baltimore, MD: The Institute for Innovation & Implementation, University of Maryland School of Social Work.

*FreeState Justice, Inc. (formerly FreeState Legal Project, Inc., merging with Equality Maryland) is a social justice organization that works through direct legal services, legislative and policy advocacy, and community engagement to enable Marylanders across the spectrum of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer identities to be free to live authentically, with safety and dignity, in all communities throughout our state.*

**BOARD**

Ronald C. Hokemeyer  
**President**  
Baltimore Gas & Electric, retired

Lee Westgate  
**Vice President**  
University of Maryland  
Behavior Health at Absolute Care

Woody Derricks, CFP  
**Treasurer**  
Partnership Wealth Management

R. Eric Thomas  
**Secretary**  
ELLE.com

Vanessa Bowling-Avajan  
Hispanic Association on  
Corporate Responsibility

Lee Carpenter  
Saul Ewing Arnstein and Lehr

Crystal Coache  
Allovue

Michael DeStefano  
University of Baltimore

Brianna January, MPP  
Media Matters

Mala Malhotra-Ortiz, Esq.

Rianna Matthews-Brown

Joanne D. Rosen, Esq.  
Johns Hopkins University  
Bloomberg School of Public Health

Diane Stollenwerk, MPP  
StollenWerks

Ebony Thompson, Esq.  
Venable LLP

Jessica P. Weber, Esq.  
Brown, Goldstein & Levy, LLP

LGBTQ youth are at increased risks for homelessness compared to their peers. Many of these youth are forced out of their homes because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression in which their legal guardians feel they are breaking societal or personal norms. Many youths may leave environments where their sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression has led to physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. The need for self-consent to these shelters are essential for safety of these youth. HB 206 will address this concern by creating more emergency shelter options for these youth. By providing clarity in the law to allow for self-consent by unaccompanied minors, service providers will legally be accountable for services provided. The requirement to register as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization ensures legitimate shelters that are known to state authorities. HB 206 will also help prevent exploitation such as sex trafficking of unaccompanied homeless minors by increasing safe shelter options. In agreement with our goal towards improving the lives of LGBTQ Marylanders, unaccompanied homeless minors deserve the ability to obtain safety for themselves by accessing safe shelters.

**FreeState Justice strongly urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 206.**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important legislation, and please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

Mark A. Procopio  
Executive Director