

Greetings distinguished Chair and members of this committee:

My name is Merrick Moses Moise and I am a victim advocate within the Office of the State's Attorney for Baltimore City. I have been an advocate within the LGBTQ community for 19 years and community peace activist since 1990. In my travels, I have met many Queer and Trans people who are afraid of the criminal justice system, believing that they will not be treated fairly or justly. They have witnessed their Queer and Trans loved ones in community not receive justice they so desperately seek and deserve.

One such incident that runs through my mind is the case of Mia Henderson. Mia Henderson was a Black transwomen who was killed in Baltimore City on July 16, 2014 in Northwest Baltimore. A man named Shaun Oliver was eventually arrested for this gruesome stabbing. As the advocate assigned to the case, I knew we had an uphill battle to prove the case. The case was rather circumstantial in nature, and I was told by the lead prosecutor to manage the expectation of Ms. Henderson's family and friends. What we didn't account for was the public defender's use of transphobic language and fearmongering. During questioning of one of her own witnesses, the public defender asked did Mia look "like a boy or a girl" when the witness last saw her. The witness was annoyed and shocked by the question. Ms. Henderson's family and friends were upset and deeply troubled by the question. Mia Henderson was a woman of trans experience who lived as a woman. This is a matter of public record. The final insult to injury was when the public defender told the jury during closing statements that "he" referring to Ms. Henderson "hadn't had sex reassignment surgery yet".

At that point, an elder Black trans woman who was sitting with Mia's family began crying and another young trans woman began crying. This was an appalling and disgusting statement. It was meant to dehumanize and other Mia to the jury. I am not sure if this was a factor in the jury's acquittal of the suspect, but I do know that it shook me and Mia's family and friends to the core. I personally believe that the public defender used those inappropriate statement to play off of the ignorance and possible bias of jury members. Truthfully, I was shocked that a member of the bar would stoop so low. Mia's life was not about surgery. She did not deserve to be mocked and labeled in death.

My hope today is that we begin seeing LGBTQ people with dignity and respect, not reducing people to their body parts or surgeries. We are a vulnerable community that continues to fight daily for dignity, respect, and our right to live without stigma or harassment. The American Psychiatric Association has debunked gay panic disorder in its manuals. It is high time that the state of MD ban LGBTQ panic defense as it is meant to dehumanize, debase, and devalue the lives of our LGBTQ family, friends, and neighbors.