


F R O M	Name & Title	Dr. Letitia Dzirasa, Commissioner	Health Department AGENCY REPORT	
	Agency Name & Address	Health Department 1001 E. Fayette Street Baltimore, Maryland 21201		
	Subject: Position:	21-0069R – Investigative Hearing - Well-being of the Transgender Community in Baltimore FAVORABLE		

To: President and Members
of the City Council
c/o 409 City Hall

November 15, 2021

The Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) is pleased to have the opportunity to review Council Bill #21-0069R, entitled, “Investigative Hearing - Well-being of the Transgender Community in Baltimore.” The purpose of this bill is to call on several City and State agencies to “update the Council on services provided to and the general well-being of the transgender community in Baltimore.”

BCHD is a strong proponent of inclusivity and directly addressing health disparities across all of Baltimore City’s communities. The transgender community in Baltimore City, as well as across the country, experiences greater discrimination in day-to-day interactions and in accessing healthcare than the public at large.¹ As documented in a number of studies, continuous exposure to stigma, trauma, and discrimination marginalizes the transgender community, thereby contributing to health risk and poor outcomes.² The transgender community reports increased levels of physical violence and sexual assault, “over four times the national average of HIV infection,” greater use of “drugs and alcohol specifically to cope with mistreatment,” significantly higher rates of tobacco usage, and substantially higher rates of suicide attempts.³ Numerous instances of violence against the transgender community have been documented in Baltimore City.⁴ Understanding the significant barriers facing Baltimore City’s transgender community members, BCHD has engaged in extensive efforts in advocacy, collaboration with and funding of partners, inclusivity of transgender individuals, and service delivery.

¹ N. Ali, W., SD. Baral, R., U. Boehmer, D., R. Clark, N., K. Clements-Nolle, R., Cole, E., . . . KJ. Zucker, A. Self-Reported Discrimination in Health-Care Settings Based on Recognizability as Transgender: A Cross-Sectional Study Among Transgender U.S. Citizens. Retrieved September 11, 2020, from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10508-017-1028-z>

² Cargill VA. Valuing the Vulnerable: The Important Role of Transgender Communities in Biomedical Research. *Ethn Dis.* 2020;30(2):247-250; doi:10.18865/ed.30.2.247

³ Grant, Jaime M., Lisa A. Mottet, Justin Tanis, Jack Harrison, Jody L. Herman, and Mara Keisling. *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey.* Washington: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011.

⁴ Strickland, R. (2021, May 6). Family, friends gather for vigil to remember transgender woman killed in Baltimore. Retrieved November 15, 2021, from <https://www.wmar2news.com/news/local-news/family-friends-gather-for-vigil-to-remember-transgender-woman-killed-in-baltimore>.

BCHD collaborates with and provides funding for HIV/STI prevention, opioid use disorder support and care coordination, and harm reduction initiatives to Baltimore Safe Haven, a transgender-owned and led organization. We provide funding to other organizations who work with transgender individuals and/or strive to be open and welcoming to those in transgender communities. This list includes, but is not limited to, several HIV clinics across the city such as those at University of Maryland (Star Track/Reach program), Chase Brexton, FQHCs (Total Healthcare, Baltimore Medical System), and Hopkins (Bartlett clinic, Harriet Lane Clinic, REACH program), among others. In our funding agreements with these partners, we emphasize the importance of ensuring their programming is welcoming to and inclusive of members of transgender communities. Additionally, our Office of Youth and Trauma Services partners with organizations who service transgender youth directly (like Aziza Peace) or who are already connected with youth from the transgender community.

We strive to have our community engagement groups be inclusive of transgender people. Our main stakeholder group for HIV prevention, the Baltimore City HIV Prevention Group (HPG) provides direct guidance to BCHD on the effectiveness of our programs, use of federal funds, and creation and execution of HIV prevention initiatives, among other items. We have held many of our social innovations and community engagement programs with and/or including transgender individuals; much of which has focused around stigma reduction. Examples include: our storytelling events, Baltimore in Conversation, which aim to provide spaces for transgender individuals and their allies to tell their stories, have others learn from them, be empowered by them, and help transform the health and public health landscape. In the past, for example, these have focused on the need for understanding and acceptance of transgender individuals in the medical system. Our small group discussions that often inform the body of our work included transgender individuals and topics of particular interest to transgender community members.

Understanding the importance of gender-affirming health care, we aim for our own programs to be available, accessible, welcoming and helpful to everyone, including those who identify as transgender, as well as advocating for others to do the same. For example, in 2020, BCHD successfully sought the passage of “House Bill 1120 - Health Care Providers and Health Benefit Plans – Discrimination in Provision of Services” in the Maryland General Assembly. This law will, in part, prevent discrimination against transgender individuals by hospitals and insurers. In addition to ongoing advocacy efforts, BCHD provides direct services to the transgender community through the Sexual Health Clinic and Family Planning & Reproductive Health Clinic. These clinics provide free and confidential STI testing and treatment, HIV testing and treatment, PrEP and PEP for the prevention of HIV, Hepatitis C testing and treatment or referrals for primary care/dental/vision services, and substance use and mental health screenings and referrals. Our Sexual Health and Wellness Clinics strive to be opening to transgender individuals. The staff who work in these clinics have had specific training in conducting medically-appropriate and culturally sensitive STI screening with transgender people.

Additionally, our Ryan White program has been working to connect our subrecipient organizations that have gender affirming care to help train those that do not. We recently connected one of our subrecipients, that reaches youth in gender and sexual minorities, to

another to help train them in gender affirming care and the issues of critical importance for transgender care. The program is now doing this with several other of our subrecipients, while also tracking the link between care, viral load suppression, and services utilized. Our Ryan White program also offers enhanced Emergency Financial Assistance and medical transportation for transgender clients as we recognize the role those services play in helping to link them to care and other resources.

BCHD believes a meaningful dialogue is necessary to help meet the needs of Baltimore City's transgender community and therefore requests a **favorable** report on Council Bill #21-0069R.