



HOMELESS PERSONS REPRESENTATION PROJECT, INC.

201 North Charles Street, Suite 1104 Baltimore, MD 21201

City Council Investigative Hearing 20-0199R– Well-Being of the Transgender Community in Baltimore

Health Committee, September 15, 2020

Testimony of Sam Williamson, Homeless Persons Representation Project, Inc.

Dear Health Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on the wellbeing of transgender communities in Baltimore City. I am a nonbinary attorney working with the Homeless Persons Representation Project (HPRP). HPRP is a nonprofit organization that provides free legal representation to those at risk of or experiencing homelessness, with the ultimate goal of ending homelessness in Maryland. HPRP has seen firsthand that trans individuals are overrepresented among those experiencing homelessness in Baltimore and are underserved and even harmed by the systems meant to address homelessness.

Although HPRP applauds the decision to hold an investigatory hearing, HPRP recognizes that the barriers faced by transgender residents of Baltimore are already well documented. Trans residents have long asked for tangible support, including by combating housing discrimination, providing culturally competent and trans-specific services, and funding grassroots trans-led community organizations.

Providing support now is crucial. Transgender individuals face barriers when accessing services, from government forms and employees without basic knowledge of trans identities, to the disproportionate impact of criminalized poverty and sex work, racist and transphobic policing, and limitations on eligibility for benefits (including by demanding documents where self-attestation should suffice, such as demonstrating gender identity or that one is experiencing homelessness). In addition to the local lack of support, the federal government is actively marginalizing trans communities by removing anti-discrimination protections in healthcare, schools, prisons, the military, and likely soon in emergency shelters.¹ Currently, our governments encourage a culture of demeaning and harming trans and gender-expansive people. In Baltimore, this climate has resulted in the deaths of several young Black trans women, as well as adding to the burden of trauma and minority stress for trans persons when they step into public space.

It is up to the City Council to change these realities in our city. Black trans leaders have been offering solutions. The question is whether the City Council has the political will to act. HPRP calls on the City Council to fund these community leaders and to create accountability processes – with teeth and community oversight – for each city agency to ensure the agency prioritizes real equity for trans communities. Now is not a time to debate whether trans communities merit action; it is the time to act.

Please let HPRP know if we can be of any assistance in this process.

Sincerely,

Sam Williamson

Skadden Fellow, Homeless Persons Representation Project

¹ See, e.g., *Making Admission or Placement Determinations Based on Sex in Facilities Under Community Planning and Development Housing Programs*, 85 Fed. Reg. 44,811 (July 24, 2020), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/07/24/2020-14718/making-admission-or-placement-determinations-based-on-sex-in-facilities-under-community-planning-and-development-housing-programs>.