

Testimony on behalf of the Maryland LGBT Chamber of Commerce

**Supporting Baltimore City Council Bill 21-0033 | Imari's  
Business Pride Act**

*A Bill to Include LGBT-Owned Businesses in  
Maryland Economic Opportunity Programs for Socially  
and Economically Disadvantaged Individual*

March 24, 2021

Thank you Councilmembers Ramos, Burnett, Middleton, Dorsey, Cohen, Stokes, Glover for introducing Council Bill 21-0033, Imari's LGBTQ Procurement Preference Act.

I submit this testimony on behalf of both the Maryland LGBT Chamber of Commerce as the Co-Founder as well as CEO of AdNet/AccountNet, Inc. a certified LGBTE through the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce. The Maryland Chamber was founded in 2017 with the goal to expand opportunities for LGBT owned businesses throughout Maryland.

You may ask, why is the LGBT inclusion needed if I am already recognized in the State and City MBE/WBE program? While I have benefited and won contracts from those programs, I was still professionally in the closet. Having to hide the core of who I am was an exhausting way to be. Though it was my choice to remain silent, over my 31 years in business being an "out" gay woman was never encouraged or welcomed. I could only bring half of who I was into a business transaction. While conversations were plentiful hearing about other colleagues' marriages and families, I remained silent. Now, I wear all of my diversities proudly and I am a better business person because of my courage to be out. But I also know that my privileges make even this difficult experience easier than those faced by those who are both LGBTQ *and* Black, Hispanic, disabled, etc. This program will help them most of all at an economic time through COVID, when many small businesses need to be jump started to survive. This bill will open up more doors of opportunity.

When I received my LGBTE certification through the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce, that was my ticket to better compete in the corporate space. While it was difficult to compete with large national primes to service corporate customers, it was now a requirement that the primes had to adhere to including LGBTE's as part of their teams. As a result, I was awarded subcontracting opportunities with large corporations like Accenture, Northrop Grumman, and Wells Fargo to name a few. Without my LGBT certification, I would not have been allowed in the door.



Advocates for Workplace Excellence & Equality



We have an opportunity to accomplish the same strategy here in Baltimore City. By adding LGBTE's to the list of Minority and Women Business Enterprises, not only allows a procurement officer to fulfil on multiple minority spend requirements, but it also encourages large primes to include an LGBT owned firm on their team of subcontractors.

To win a contract, and LGBTE must demonstrate past performance and ability to perform the requirement of a contract the same way every bidder is required. We will earn your trust, but we need the door to be opened to let you know we are here to serve.

Baltimore City already led the way for an Executive Order to be signed in 2018. Let us put it into law and make history as a progressive and equitably inclusive City in the Mid-Atlantic region. Our City deserves this win and to make the statement that we are open for business for ALL diverse business groups.

We appreciate you time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Betsy Cerulo".

Betsy Cerulo

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