



2025 Maryland Legislative Session

Policy Report

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Executive Summary

Purpose

This report outlines FreeState Justice's 2025 legislative efforts in Annapolis, the outcomes for LGBTQ+ Marylanders and people living with HIV, and how these results shape the next phase of advocacy. We tracked 59 bills in the Maryland General Assembly and organized the work into three areas: Public Health and Criminal Justice, Education and Youth, and Public Health and Social Well-Being. We specify where we led, supported, and opposed, along with the evidence guiding the 2026 agenda.

By The Numbers

Total Bills Tracked

59

Posture Counts

Championed = 1

Supported = 53

Opposed = 5

Landmark Outcome

Repeal of Maryland's HIV criminalization law, the Carlton R. Smith Jr. HIV Modernization Act.

Maryland has repealed its HIV criminal offense law. The reform removes an outdated statute that criminalized people living with HIV and shifts from fear-based approaches to public health practices. Repealing the law aligns it with current scientific understanding. It eliminates a barrier to testing by removing a criminal consequence associated with knowing one's status. It supports linkage to treatment by reducing the risk that disclosure and care engagement will be used against people living with HIV. It promotes stigma reduction by ending a law that was enforced unfairly and no longer aligns with modern prevention methods like PrEP and treatment as prevention. The law was approved on May 20, 2025, and will take effect on October 1, 2025. FreeState Justice educated lawmakers and the public, centered lived experience, and helped coordinate a bipartisan strategy through both chambers.

Additional Enacted Measures With Measurable Benefit

County Board Member Anti-Bias Training

HB0324

Requires each county board of education member to complete antibias training at least once per term. Approved on May 6, 2025. Effective July 1, 2025. This enhances local governance, where many protections for LGBTQ+ youth are established and enforced.

Public Health Abortion Grant Program

HB0930

Creates a dedicated grant program and fund to support access to abortion care, effective July 1, 2025. This initiative helps stabilize clinical capacity and patient access while supporting safety-net providers that also serve LGBTQ+ and HIV-affected communities.

Access to Counsel in Evictions

SB0154

Extends funding and a fourteen-million-dollar annual allocation to the Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund through fiscal year 2028. Effective June 1, 2025. Counsel at the doorstep helps reduce displacement and improves health and safety for LGBTQ+ youth, elders, and people living with HIV.

Maryland Second Look Act

HB00853

Allows individuals with at least twenty years of service to petition for a sentence reduction. Courts must consider maturity, rehabilitation, and risk, along with victim notification and input. Approved on April 22, 2025, as Chapter 96. Effective October 1, 2025. This law modifies severe sentences, incorporates developmental science for emerging adults, and aims to reduce unnecessary incarceration costs.

Geriatric and Medical Parole

SB0181

Modernizes parole procedures by requiring the Parole Commission to consider age, updating medical parole standards, eliminating gubernatorial disapproval for medical parole, and establishing timelines for risk assessments in cases with long sentences. Approved on April 22, 2025, as Chapter 102. Effective October 1, 2025. This promotes humane release decisions and supports fiscal responsibility.

Lessons That Change How We Work

1. Implementation involves policy

Guidance, training, and public education determine whether repeal leads to increased testing and reduced stigma. We will work with the Department of Health and justice partners and monitor the results.

2. Access depends on investment.

Dedicated funds with clear eligibility criteria and established delivery channels ensure measurable access. We will prioritize budget and policy packages over unfunded mandates.

3. Process integrity is crucial in sentence review

Clear criteria, timelines, and standards for victim participation foster fairness and improve outcomes. We will record results and suggest targeted adjustments.

4. Data and Accountability

We collect and analyze disaggregated data to identify service gaps and improve outcomes. Transparency and stakeholder feedback keep us accountable and responsive.

5. Local governance capacity greatly influences youth safety

Anti-bias training for school boards is a valuable tool in fighting bullying, book bans, and exclusionary practices. We will promote model content and ensure compliance tracking.

6. Coalitions that combine legal expertise with service delivery

This type of combination addresses tough issues facing Maryland's marginalized communities. We will apply the repeal coalition model during implementation and in the next proactive package.

How We Worked

Posture Definitions

Champion

FreeState Justice led drafting, strategy, and coalition management, taking responsibility for the success or failure of a bill.

Follow or Support

FreeState Justice partnered with other efforts through testimony, community mobilization, amendment analysis, and legal and policy support.

Oppose

FreeState Justice worked to stop or amend provisions that increase criminalization, restrict healthcare, undermine youth safety, or weaken civil rights.

Data Sources

We rely on the internal FreeState Justice tracker for posture and coalition activity, Maryland General Assembly bill pages for official text, votes, fiscal and policy notes, and chapter laws, partner memoranda, and coalition materials for community impact and implementation needs, as well as FreeState Justice public statements for message discipline and transparency.

Categorization Notes

Public Health and Criminal Justice involve the repeal of HIV criminalization laws and justice reform measures such as Second Look, as well as geriatric and medical parole. Education and Youth include anti-bias training for school board members and related governance tools. Public Health and Social Well-Being cover access to counsel in eviction cases and the abortion grant program. Each item states our stance and the measurable outcomes expected by the effective date, such as training completion rates, petitions filed and adjudicated, grant awards issued, or the number of households served.



Phillip Westry, Esq.
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Phillip Westry Jr.".



Ronnie Taylor
Community Impact Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ronnie L. Taylor".

PUBLIC HEALTH & CRIMINAL JUSTICE

BILL TITLE	POSITION	BILL DESCRIPTION	DID IT PASS?
Public Health – Prohibition on Transfer of Human Immunodeficiency Virus – Repeal <i>HB0039</i>	Favorable	Repeals outdated HIV criminalization statute. <i>Sponsored by Fair</i>	<i>Passed, Signed Into Law</i>
Public Health – Prohibition on Transfer of Human Immunodeficiency Virus – Repeal <i>SB0356</i>	Favorable	Senate cross-file repealing HIV criminalization. <i>Sponsored by Smith</i>	<i>Passed, Signed Into Law</i>
Criminal Procedure – Expungement of Records – Good Cause <i>HB0055</i>	Favorable	Allows expungement on a good-cause showing. <i>Sponsored by Ruff</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Correctional Services – Geriatric and Medical Parole <i>HB0190</i>	Favorable	Expands parole for elderly and medically fragile people. <i>Sponsored by Bartlett</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Correctional Services – Geriatric and Medical Parole <i>SB0181</i>	Favorable	Senate cross-file to expand geriatric/medical parole. <i>Sponsored by Hettleman</i>	<i>Passed, Signed Into Law</i>
No-Knock Warrants <i>HB0613</i>	Favorable	Restricts or prohibits use of no-knock warrants. <i>Sponsored by Acevero</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Criminal Procedure – Protection of Identity of Victim of Sexual Assault <i>SB0181</i>	Favorable	Shields sexual-assault victims' identities. <i>Sponsored by Guyton</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>

PUBLIC HEALTH & CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Continued

BILL TITLE	POSITION	BILL DESCRIPTION	DID IT PASS?
Civil Actions – Immunity – Disclosure of Allegations of Sexually Assaultive Behavior (Stop Silencing Survivors Act) <i>HB0629</i>	Favorable	Grants civil immunity for good-faith disclosures about sexual assault. <i>Sponsored by Bartlett</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Civil Actions – Immunity – Disclosure of Allegations of Sexually Assaultive Behavior <i>SB0549</i>	Favorable	Senate cross-file protecting survivor speech. <i>Sponsored by Love</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Criminal Procedure – Out of Court Statements – Vulnerable Adult Victims and Witnesses <i>HB0677</i>	Favorable	Admits certain reliable statements from vulnerable adults. <i>Sponsored by Toles</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Criminal Procedure – Out of Court Statements – Vulnerable Adult Victims and Witnesses <i>SB0298</i>	Favorable	Senate cross-file for the same evidence rule. <i>Sponsored by Waldstreicher</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Task Force to Study Forced Infant Separation From Incarcerated Individuals <i>HB0837</i>	Favorable	Studies and recommends reforms on infant separation in corrections. <i>Sponsored by Mireku - North</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Criminal Procedure – Domestic Violence Offender Registry <i>HB0847</i>	Favorable	Creates a registry for certain domestic-violence offenders. <i>Sponsored by McCaskill</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Criminal Procedure – Petition to Reduce Sentence (Maryland Second Look Act) <i>HB0853</i>	Favorable	Lets long-incarcerated people seek sentence reductions. <i>Sponsored by Pasteur</i>	<i>Passed, Signed Into Law</i>

PUBLIC HEALTH & CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Continued

BILL TITLE	POSITION	BILL DESCRIPTION	DID IT PASS?
Award of Attorney's Fees and Expenses – Violation of Maryland Constitutional Right <i>HB0818</i>	Favorable	Authorizes fee-shifting for successful constitutional claims. <i>Sponsored by Ruff</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Immigration Enforcement – Sensitive Locations – Guidelines and Policies (Protecting Sensitive Locations Act) <i>HB1006</i>	Favorable	Limits enforcement at places like schools, hospitals, and courthouses. <i>Sponsored by Wilkins</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Criminal Law – Masked Intimidation – Prohibition (Unmask Hate Act) <i>HB1081</i>	Favorable	Prohibits using masks to threaten or intimidate. <i>Sponsored by Boafo</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Criminal Law – Masked Intimidation – Prohibition <i>SB0709</i>	Favorable	Senate cross-file banning masked intimidation <i>Sponsored by Waldstreicher</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Commission to Review and Assess Racial Disparities in the State Criminal Justice System – Establishment <i>HB1423</i>	Favorable	Creates a commission to assess and reduce justice disparities. <i>Sponsored by Crutchfield</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Correctional Services – Private Detention Facilities – Deprivation of Rights, Privileges, and Immunities <i>SB0786</i>	Favorable	Establishes accountability for rights violations in private detention. <i>Sponsored by President</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Hate Crimes and Hate Bias – Definitions of Sexual Orientation and Hate Bias Incident <i>HB1452</i>	Favorable	Updates definitions to strengthen hate-crime enforcement. <i>Sponsored by Vogel</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>

EDUCATION & YOUTH

BILL TITLE	POSITION	BILL DESCRIPTION	DID IT PASS?
Institutions of Higher Education and Elementary and Secondary Schools – Title VI Coordinators <i>HB0086</i>	Favorable	Requires designated civil-rights coordinators in schools and colleges. <i>Sponsored by Vogel</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Institutions of Higher Education and Elementary and Secondary Schools - Title VI Coordinators (Remove Discrimination in Education Act) <i>SB0435</i>	Favorable	Senate cross-file requiring Title VI coordinators. <i>Sponsored by Waldstreicher</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Primary and Secondary Education – Comprehensive Health Education Framework – Established <i>HB0161</i>	Favorable	Sets statewide framework for comprehensive health education. <i>Sponsored by Atterbeary and Fair</i>	<i>Passed, Signed Into Law</i>
Nonpublic Schools – Transcripts – Prohibition on Punitive Measures Related to Student Debt <i>HB0184</i>	Favorable	Bars transcript withholding for unpaid balances. <i>Sponsored by Smith</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
County Boards of Education – Antibias Training for Members – Requirement (County Board Member Antibias Training Act) <i>HB0324</i>	Favorable	Mandates antibias training for school board members. <i>Sponsored by Korman and Atterbeary</i>	<i>Passed, Signed Into Law</i>
County Boards of Education – Antibias Training for Members <i>SB0293</i>	Favorable	Senate cross-file on antibias training. <i>Sponsored by Feldman</i>	<i>Passed, Signed Into Law</i>
Primary and Secondary Education – Educator Professional Development – Course on Student Well-Being and Flourishing <i>HB0457</i>	Favorable	Requires professional development on student well-being. <i>Sponsored by Wolek</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>

EDUCATION & YOUTH

Continued

BILL TITLE	POSITION	BILL DESCRIPTION	DID IT PASS?
Primary and Secondary Education - Educator Professional Development – Course on Student Well-Being and Flourishing <i>SB0350</i>	Favorable	Senate cross-file on professional development. <i>Sponsored by Lam</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Education – Antidiscrimination Policies – Policy and Notice Requirements <i>HB0495</i>	Favorable	Standardizes and publicizes anti-discrimination policies. <i>Sponsored by Kaufman</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Education – Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program – Human and Sex Trafficking <i>HB0763</i>	Favorable	Adds trafficking content to prevention curricula. <i>Sponsored by S. Johnson</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Commission on History, Culture, and Civics in Education <i>HB0875</i>	Favorable	Creates a commission to strengthen civics and history. <i>Sponsored by Acevero</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Higher Education – Disciplinary Records – Use in Admissions and Disciplinary Proceedings <i>SB0151</i>	Favorable	Regulates the use of prior disciplinary records. <i>Sponsored by A. Washington</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Elementary and Secondary Education – Curriculum – Importance of Diversity <i>HJ0005</i>	Favorable	Affirms the value of diversity in K-12 curricula. <i>Sponsored by Fair</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Education – Interscholastic and Intramural Junior Varsity and Varsity Teams – Designation Based on Sex (Fairness in Girls’ Sports Act) <i>HB0156</i>	Unfavorable	Restricts transgender students’ participation in girls’ sports. <i>Sponsored by Szeliga</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>

EDUCATION & YOUTH

Continued

BILL TITLE	POSITION	BILL DESCRIPTION	DID IT PASS?
Public Schools – Sexually Explicit Materials – Prohibited in Libraries and Media Centers <i>HB0282</i>	Unfavorable	Broadly censors school library materials. <i>Sponsored by Mangione</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Children – Parental Rights – Educational Rights <i>HB1385</i>	Unfavorable	Expands parental control in ways that undermine inclusive education. <i>Sponsored by Miller</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Children – Parental Rights – Educational Rights <i>SB0948</i>	Unfavorable	Senate cross-file with similar restrictions. <i>Sponsored by Ready</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>

PUBLIC HEALTH & SOCIAL WELL-BEING

BILL TITLE	POSITION	BILL DESCRIPTION	DID IT PASS?
Access to Counsel in Evictions – Task Force Termination and Special Fund <i>HB0103</i>	Favorable	Continues and funds access-to-counsel for tenants. <i>Sponsored by Rosenberg</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Access to Counsel in Evictions – Task Force Termination and Special Fund <i>SB0154</i>	Favorable	Senate cross-file sustaining the program. <i>Sponsored by Hettleman and Guzzone</i>	<i>Passed, Signed Into Law</i>
Task Force on Loneliness and Isolation <i>HB0141</i>	Favorable	Treats social isolation as a public-health issue. <i>Sponsored by Vogel</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Charitable Organizations – Late Fees and Registration – Suspension and Cancellation Requirements <i>HB0239</i>	Favorable	Updates nonprofit registration and fee rules. <i>Sponsored by Departmental — Secretary of State</i>	<i>Passed, Signed Into Law</i>
Charitable Organizations - Late Fees and Registration - Suspension and Cancellation Requirements <i>SB0184</i>	Favorable	Senate cross-file aligning charity oversight. <i>Sponsored by Departmental — Secretary of State</i>	<i>Passed, Sign Into Law</i>
Human Relations – Discrimination in Housing – Income-Based Housing Subsidies <i>HB0896</i>	Favorable	Bars source-of-income discrimination. <i>Sponsored by Stewart</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Human Relations – Discrimination in Housing – Income-Based Housing Subsidies <i>SB0677</i>	Favorable	Senate cross-file on housing fairness. <i>Sponsored by Gile</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>

PUBLIC HEALTH & SOCIAL WELL-BEING

Continue

BILL TITLE	POSITION	BILL DESCRIPTION	DID IT PASS?
Hospitals – Clinical Staffing Committees and Plans – Establishment (Safe Staffing Act of 2025) <i>HB0905</i>	Favorable	Requires hospital staffing committees and safe-staffing plans. <i>Sponsored by White Holland</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Public Health Abortion Grant Program – Establishment <i>HB0930</i>	Favorable	Funds access to abortion services. <i>Sponsored by Lopez</i>	<i>Passed, Signed Into Law</i>
Commission on Nondiscrimination – Establishment <i>HB1055</i>	Favorable	Creates a statewide body to address discrimination. <i>Sponsored by Fair</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Maryland Department of Social Equity – Established <i>HB1253</i>	Favorable	Creates an agency to advance social equity. <i>Sponsored by Speaker</i>	<i>Passed, Signed Into Law</i>
Hospitals – Medical Debt Collection – Sale of Patient Debt to Nonprofit Organizations <i>HB1324</i>	Favorable	Enables/structures sale of medical debt for relief. <i>Sponsored by Spiegel</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
End-of-Life Option Act (The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings and the Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass Act) <i>HB1328</i>	Favorable	Allows medical aid-in-dying under safeguards. <i>Sponsored by Hill</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Certificates of Birth, Licenses, and Identification Cards – Sex Designation (Birth Certificate Modernization Act) <i>HB1368</i>	Favorable	Modernizes ID sex-designation processes. <i>Sponsored by Martinez</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>

PUBLIC HEALTH & SOCIAL WELL-BEING

Continue

BILL TITLE	POSITION	BILL DESCRIPTION	DID IT PASS?
Certificates of Birth, Licenses, and Identification Cards – Sex Designation <i>SB0314</i>	Favorable	Senate cross-file modernizing IDs. <i>Sponsored by Lam and Waldstreicher</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Health Occupations – Cross-Sex Hormone Therapy for Minors – Prohibition (Protect the Kids Act) <i>HB1399</i>	Unfavorable	Bans gender-affirming hormone care for minors. <i>Sponsored by Arian</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
State Government – Maryland Reparations Commission <i>HB1422</i>	Favorable	Establishes a commission to study and advance reparations. <i>Sponsored by McCaskill</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
State Government – Maryland Reparations Commission <i>SB0587</i>	Favorable	Senate cross-file creating the commission. <i>Sponsored by Muse</i>	<i>Passed, Vetoed By Governor</i>
Constitutional Officers – Gender-Neutral Language <i>SB0733</i>	Favorable	Updates statutes to gender-neutral terms. <i>Sponsored by King</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion – The American Dream <i>HJ0004</i>	Favorable	Reaffirms state support for DEI values. <i>Sponsored by Martinez</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion – The American Dream <i>SJ0003</i>	Favorable	Senate joint resolution affirming DEI principles. <i>Sponsored by Benson</i>	<i>Did Not Advance</i>

Landmark Win

HIV CRIMINALIZATION

REPEAL

Maryland criminalized the alleged transfer or attempted transfer of HIV. The law linked criminal exposure to a health condition rather than to conduct that presents a real risk. This discouraged testing and disclosure, hampered engagement in care, and made partner services more difficult. Enforcement was inconsistent: communities of color, transgender individuals, sex workers, people who use drugs, and those facing housing instability were more often investigated and arrested.

The General Assembly reviewed repeal bills in both chambers. Committee chairs scheduled hearings and collected written and oral testimony. Amendments revised the text to align with current public health guidelines. Both chambers approved the final version through recorded votes. Insert committee votes and floor votes. The Governor signed the Act on May 20, 2025. The law will take effect on October 1, 2025.

FreeState Justice collaborated with legal, medical, and community partners. We developed plain-language materials and answered technical questions from members and staff. We prepared testimony that highlighted lived experiences and current science. We supported community witnesses and aligned messages across organizations. We briefed the press and provided subject matter experts for reporters.

Repealing the law aligns it with scientific understanding. It eliminates a legal penalty related to knowing one's HIV status. It decreases the risk that disclosure or care engagement will be used against people living with HIV. It encourages same-day testing and faster access to care. It improves treatment as prevention and increases PrEP availability. Expected results include more HIV testing, shorter time from diagnosis to the first medical visit, higher viral suppression rates, and fewer arrests and prosecutions related to alleged exposure.

Implementation will target communities that bore the heaviest burden under the previous law. Outreach will focus on jurisdictions with higher enforcement levels and populations with lower testing and suppression rates. Training for defenders and prosecutors will cover effective date, screening, and dismissal procedures. Clinical partners will include disclosure counseling and treatment as prevention messages.



Legal Director Lauren Pruitt hugging Governor Wes Moore at the signing of the Carlton R. Smith Jr. HIV Modernization Act into law

Positions on recent Supreme Court and Federal Actions

Kennedy v. Braidwood Management

The Supreme Court upheld the authority of the United States Preventive Services Task Force. It maintained the Affordable Care Act requirement that preventive services remain available without out-of-pocket costs. This includes PrEP for HIV, cancer screenings, and other Grade A and Grade B services. The ruling ensures zero-cost preventive care for most people with private insurance and stabilizes access to PrEP in Maryland. Plans must continue to cover PrEP medication, required laboratory tests, and clinical visits without cost-sharing. State regulators and consumer assistance programs should closely monitor compliance and promptly address any denials.

FreeState Justice supports the ruling and advocates for its full enforcement in Maryland. We will work with state agencies, carriers, and providers to ensure accessible PrEP for all. We remain committed to advancing a 2026 PrEP access bill that aims to remove prior authorization barriers, empower pharmacists to prescribe under standing orders, and fund navigation services in communities with the lowest uptake. We encourage Marylanders experiencing billing or denial issues to report cases to consumer services and FreeState Justice for follow-up.

[Read FreeState Justice's Full Press Release Here](#)

Mahmoud v. Taylor

The Supreme Court ruled that parents challenging a district's use of LGBTQ-inclusive storybooks, along with the lack of notice and refusal to allow opt-outs, are entitled to a preliminary injunction based on claims under the Free Exercise Clause. The decision instructs lower courts to protect parents' religious exercise at this stage and signals risks for districts that deny transparency and accommodation. In Maryland, school boards should review curriculum notice practices, opt-out procedures required by state law, and staff training. Districts must safeguard student safety and inclusion while managing new litigation risks. They should document notice, provide clear processes for opt-out requests where necessary, and uphold anti-bullying and anti-harassment protections to prevent chilling effects on LGBTQ students.

FreeState Justice opposes the ruling's impact on inclusive education. We will support families and students affected by new opt-out policies, advocate for clear safeguards at the state and local levels and provide legal assistance to districts striving to maintain safe and inclusive classrooms. We will monitor implementation in Maryland and release model policy language that respects student dignity and complies with the ruling.

[Read FreeState Justice's Full Press Release Here](#)

Positions on recent Supreme Court and Federal Actions

Continued

Lawsuit challenging EEOC non-enforcement toward transgender workers

FreeState Justice and its partners filed litigation challenging the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's refusal to enforce protections for transgender workers under Title VII. The complaint alleges that the agency unlawfully narrowed enforcement despite the Supreme Court's decision in *Bostock* and seeks declaratory and injunctive relief requiring the EEOC to process and pursue charges in line with federal law. Requested remedies include vacating any conflicting policies, restoring previous guidance, and court oversight to ensure compliance.

Title VII and Maryland law prohibit discrimination based on sex, including gender identity. Employers in Maryland should implement and enforce policies that prohibit discrimination and harassment, establish clear reporting channels, update their training programs, and ensure access to benefits and facilities that reflect employees' gender identities. Workers who experience discrimination should document incidents, seek legal advice, and file timely complaints with the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights or the EEOC. FreeState Justice will continue intake and impact litigation support and will provide updates as the case progresses.

[Read FreeState Justice's Full Press Release Here](#)



Governor Wes Moore signing the Carlton R. Smith Jr. HIV Modernization Act into law.

Preview of 2026 PrEP Access Legislation

This section highlights ongoing efforts to improve PrEP access in Maryland. It builds on the HIV modernization efforts following the repeal victory. It does not specify any bill language. Instead, it outlines the areas being examined and the questions that guide the analysis.

PrEP uptake in Maryland remains uneven. Coverage is included in statutes and plan documents, yet many people encounter delays and unexpected costs. Prior authorization delays same-day starts. Lab bills and follow-up visits still result in out-of-pocket charges. Pharmacy access varies across regions and networks. Community clinics and navigators bear heavy loads without stable funding. Rural and suburban areas have lower awareness and fewer services. Black and Brown communities, transgender people, youth, and those without stable housing face the greatest barriers.

Guiding principles

Prioritize evidence and equity. Safeguard zero-cost preventive care where state authority is involved. Minimize administrative hurdles that hinder quick implementation. Align clinical practices with the latest scientific knowledge. Develop transparent data systems that reveal effective strategies and identify persistent gaps.

Elements Under Review

Pharmacist prescribing and same-day starts

Analysis is underway for a statewide protocol that would enable pharmacists to initiate and maintain PrEP. The review includes eligibility screening, immediate dispensing, documentation, telehealth use, reimbursement standards, and coordination with primary care or clinics when available.

Lab coverage, follow-up visits, and rapid start support

Reviewing coverage for baseline and monitoring labs without cost sharing. The analysis includes starter packs, bridge fills, standing orders for rapid starts, navigator support for uninsured and underinsured clients, and connections between mobile testing and same-day initiation.

Engagement will concentrate on communities most affected by HIV and facing access barriers. Strategies include peer navigators, evening and mobile clinics, placement of pharmacist prescribers in areas with limited primary care, and materials available in several languages. Funding plans will allow for quick adjustments if equity gaps continue.

Next Steps

- 1 Conclude coalition feedback
- 2 Finalize the framing memo with legal, clinical, and community partners.
- 3 Identify sponsors and timelines.
- 4 Prepare draft language for targeted sections while continuing stakeholder consultation.
- 5 Return to the General Assembly with a package that reflects evidence, equity, and operational feasibility.

Building Power FreeState Equality 501(c)(4)

FreeState Equality is the proposed 501(c)(4) partner to FreeState Justice. Its aim is to promote social welfare by turning policy ideas into action. It will educate voters, hold authorities accountable, and participate in candidate-related activities that a 501(c)(3) cannot do. FreeState Equality will grow its influence throughout the year, while FreeState Justice stays focused on charitable and educational work. Keeping the 501(c)(3) status of FreeState Justice remains a critical safeguard in this approach.

The 501(c)(4) provides continuity. During sessions, it can emphasize priority bills and budget items. Between sessions, it can influence agency rulemaking, advocate for implementation, and run accountability campaigns. In election years, it can target issue-tested messages to the voters and platforms that matter most. After elections, it can turn campaign promises into measurable policy steps. The cycle doesn't end with a vote count; it ends when a commitment appears in statute, budget,



Community Impact Director Ronnie Taylor shaking hands with Governor Wes Moore at the signing of the Carlton R. Smith Jr. HIV Modernization Act into law

or practice. Any candidate supported by FreeState Equality will be chosen based on documented commitments and public records. We will use an issue questionnaire aligned with our policy agenda. We will publish criteria before making endorsements.

We will utilize scorecards and pledge tracking that are accessible to the public. We will keep copies of questionnaires, votes, sponsorships, and meeting notes that inform our decisions. We will publish endorsement memos outlining the policy basis and expected actions in office. We will monitor implementation after the election and report on follow-through.

The 501(c)(4) will adhere to all federal and state laws regarding electoral activities, lobbying, and reporting. We will keep current records of expenses and staff hours, and we will monitor the primary purpose test for a 501(c)(4). A compliance calendar will be used for all filings. We will perform regular legal reviews of campaign and lobbying communications. Additionally, we will publish an annual impact and transparency report that details program categories, spending by category, endorsement processes, and safeguards protecting the 501(c)(3).

The 501(c)(4) will comply with all relevant state and federal limits and reporting rules for contributions and electoral spending. We will establish internal caps where the law does not specify, to reduce risk and prevent over-concentration. We will accept funds only from legal sources and will screen donations that could pose reputational or mission conflicts. We will disclose donors when required by law and may also provide voluntary disclosures by range to foster trust while maintaining safety.

This structure offers Maryland a clear and lawful way to connect policy, authority, and people. FreeState Justice remains a charitable and educational organization. FreeState Equality becomes the vehicle for accountability and electoral influence that aligns with policy commitments and public records. Both organizations serve the same mission through separate channels, clear guidelines, and full transparency.

How to Engage FreeState Justice as a Partner or Funder

If you're ready to move from ideas to implementation, here are clear ways to work with us.

1. Request a briefing

Ask for a briefing on any metric, bill, or implementation item at www.freestate-justice.org/policy-advocacy. You can also email policyteam@freestate-justice.org with your topic, audience, and preferred dates.

2. Co-develop materials and training.

We can co-create testimony, fact sheets, or training for your community or sector. Use www.freestate-justice.org/policy-advocacy to outline goals and timelines. Include the bill number or policy action, the target committee or agency, and the deliverables you need.

3. Back the data work.

Support collection and public dashboards that track access, denials, and outcomes. Indicate if you can fund data infrastructure, analyst time, or community surveying. Start the conversation at info@freestate-justice.org.

5. Invest in navigation and education.

Help expand navigation, legal education, and provider training in regions with low uptake. Contribute at www.freestatejustice.app.neoncrm.com/forms/donate and note "Policy and Implementation Support," or propose a restricted grant via grants@freestate-justice.org.

6. Formalize the partnership

Enter a written partnership or grant agreement that sets goals, deliverables, data sharing, and reporting. Request a point of contact at info@freestate-justice.org.

6. Join our Policy Advocacy efforts

FreeState Justice is always searching for advocates passionate about fighting for the rights of LGBTQ+ Marylanders at a legislative level. Click [here](#) to join our efforts today.



MARYLAND'S LGBTQ ADVOCATES

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