

**Testimony of David C. Friedman
On Behalf Of The
Washington, DC Regional Office of the
Anti-Defamation League**

**IN SUPPORT OF
SB 566
An Act Concerning Human Relations- Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity-
Antidiscrimination**

March 4, 2009

My name is David Friedman and I am the Director of the Washington, DC Regional Office of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). The Anti-Defamation League was founded in 1913 with a mandate to fight the defamation of the Jewish people and secure justice and fair treatment for all. Today the ADL is one of the country's leading civil rights organizations.

I write to express our strong support for House Bill 474, which would update and clarify Maryland's anti-discrimination statutes to explicitly protect individuals from discrimination in employment, public accommodations, housing, and credit based on their gender identity or sexual orientation.

A critical element of ADL's mission of seeking justice and fair treatment for *all* people compels us to combat bias and discrimination in whatever form it takes and against whomever it may be directed. Others here today will describe in greater detail how individuals are discriminated against simply because they do not meet societal expectations of what it means to be a man or woman. In our experience, discrimination against *any* individual or group of people not only hurts the specific individuals it targets, but also negatively affects the broader group whose members face this discrimination, as well as the community as a whole. Fortunately, Maryland's discrimination laws provide significant protection to many classes of individuals subject to discrimination as well as meaningful avenues for responding to such discrimination. Discrimination based on one's gender identity or sexual orientation, however, is as pernicious as discrimination based on those categories explicitly prohibited by current law such as race, sex and religion, and the law should provide equal and unambiguous protection from this form of discrimination as well.

We urge you to join the thirteen other states and the District of Columbia that have passed similar legislation. This meaningful change in the law will send a clear message that no one deserves to suffer discrimination because of his or her gender identity or sexual orientation.