



Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs

Meeting Minutes
January 12, 2026
6:00 PM - 8:00 PM
Zoom Virtual Meeting

Commissioners Present:

Lee Blinder, Chair
M Pease, Vice Chair
Joan Bryan
Josie Caballero
Mickey Dhir
Kurt Doan
Debb Dunn
Anthony Fox
Nicole Hollywood
Asher Kennedy

Courtney Mariette
Stephen Martin
Paula Neira
Wendy Novak
Brandon Russell
Jeffrey Slavin
Joe Toolan
Tica Torres-Bolivar
Phillip Westry
Ly Xīnzhèn Zhǎngsūn

Commissioners Not Present:

Sarah Stern

Staff and Guests Present:

Jeremy Browning, Director, Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs
Taylor Harer, Special Assistant, Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs
Charlotte Persephone Hoffman, Policy Committee Advisor

- I. Call to Order: The meeting was called to Order by Chair Blinder at 6:02 PM. Housekeeping and Meeting Guidelines were read and acknowledged. Commissioners were reminded to add their pronouns to their Zoom names and instructions were provided.
- II. Roll Call: Roll call was conducted by Chair Blinder and new commissioners were welcomed. Commissioners were asked to share their name, pronouns, jurisdiction, and reflections on how the continued attacks on trans people are impacting you. Additionally, Chair Blinder provided a review of the voting procedures using the Zoom reaction functions to indicate vote.
- III. Agenda Approval: Chair Blinder presented the agenda for general remarks or comments. After hearing no additional comments, the Chair entertained a motion for

approval. Commissioner Dunn made the motion and Commissioner Bryan seconded. The agenda was approved with one abstention from Commissioner Zhāngsūn.

IV. Reports:

- A. Chair Report: Chair Lee Blinder opened with remarks reflecting on the difficult political and social climate facing LGBTQI+ communities nationally, particularly transgender people and other marginalized groups experiencing heightened state violence and targeting. They emphasized Maryland's relative protections, acknowledged the influx of trans refugees from other states, and highlighted the continued need for advocacy amid political resistance. They reaffirmed their commitment to the Commission, expressed pride in the group's unity and work, welcomed new commissioners, and encouraged members to remain grounded in history, intersectionality, collective care, and sustained advocacy.
 - B. Vice Chair Report: Summary: Vice Chair Pease reflected on the past year's work and collective accomplishments of the Commission. They highlighted the Commission's consistent unity, collaborative approach, and bold public advocacy. Drawing on their research and statewide engagement, they emphasized the impact of the Commission's values-driven work in fostering belonging and safety across Maryland. They concluded by sharing a personal milestone regarding their upcoming dissertation defense, affirming commitment to the work ahead, and offering continued support to fellow commissioners.
 - C. Director's Report: Director Browning provided administrative updates, welcoming new members, and thanking the commissioners for their work. He reminded the Commission to complete 2025 financial disclosures by April 30, 2026, noted potential committee scheduling challenges during the legislative session, and outlined plans for committee assignments and completion of the community needs assessment. He also reviewed upcoming meetings and events, announced plans for a summer strategic planning retreat, highlighted the public calendar, and briefly reviewed the Commission's mandates.
- V. Approval: November 10, 2025 Meeting Minutes - There were no additions or corrections to the minutes and they were approved via unanimous consent.
- VI. Guest Speaker - Updates on Federal Actions: The scheduled guest speaker was unable to attend this meeting due to a personal emergency. Policy Advisor Hoffman provided updates in place of the guest speaker.
- A. Policy Advisor Hoffman provided a federal policy update focused on recent actions by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). They described a declaration issued by HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. asserting that transition-related care for minors is not considered proper medical care, which could allow the department to cut off federal healthcare funding. Multiple states have challenged this declaration in court, and Hoffman noted that the litigation is likely to succeed due to violations of the Administrative Procedure Act.
 - B. Policy Advisor Hoffman also outlined two proposed HHS rules related to Medicaid and Medicare. One would prohibit Medicaid funds from being used for transition-related care for minors, with a 60-day public comment period open through mid-February. The second, more sweeping proposal would bar any hospital that provides such care to minors from participating in Medicare

or Medicaid entirely, a move described as unprecedented and far-reaching. They warned that this approach could set a dangerous precedent for restricting other forms of healthcare and encouraged engagement through public comments, with the Health and Wellness Committee expected to review and potentially respond.

- VII. Updates: 2026 Legislative Session - The Legislative session will begin January 14, 2026 and last 90 days, with the Policy Committee tracking priority legislation, much of it carried over from the previous year, including the Birth Certificate Modernization Act. Commissioners were encouraged to assist with meetings, testimony, and hearings as bill numbers and schedules are released. Policy Advisor Hoffman updated the Commission on significant leadership changes in the House, including a new Speaker and a restructuring of key committees, while noting fewer changes in the Senate. Early pre-filed bills include renewed efforts to ban transgender girls from participating in sports, signaling an expected increase in anti-LGBTQIA+, particularly anti-trans, legislation during an election year. They also addressed concerns about a projected state budget deficit, explaining that fiscal constraints may limit passage of new progressive legislation and could be used to avoid difficult votes, though the state is expected to maintain existing protections. Updates were also noted regarding bill tracking and corrections to prior listings as the session proceeds.
- VIII. Discussion: LGBTQIA+ Community Needs Assessment Preliminary Findings - Director Browning shared that preliminary findings show significant challenges, including limited access to resources, barriers to healthcare, avoidance of care due to fear of discrimination, high lifetime rates of reported hate crime experiences (27%) and homelessness (16%), and negative career impacts tied to LGBTQIA+ identity. Open-ended responses emphasized that while Maryland is perceived as safer than many states, safety feels fragile and uneven by county; resources are concentrated in urban areas; healthcare access is undermined by distrust and travel burdens; and federal actions create fear even with strong state protections.
- IX. Discussion: Inclusive Schools Statement - Commissioner Russell shared the document that he drafted to the Commission. The floor was opened for questions and discussion. The document was edited in real time based on the recommendations from the Commission. Commissioner Kennedy made the motion to approve the Inclusive Schools Statement. Commissioner Russell seconded the motion and the floor was opened for discussion. The statement was approved with 1 abstention from Commissioner Zhāngsūn.
- X. Discussion: Updates to Recommendations to Support LGBTQIA+ Students - Director Browning shared updates to the Commission's LGBTQIA+ student support recommendations. The expanded 15-page report will be brought to the Commission for adoption at the February Commission meeting, with commissioners asked to submit feedback and resource suggestions within the next two weeks.
- XI. Open Forum for Announcements or Comments:
 - A. Commissioner Mariette expressed appreciation for the meeting and praised leadership and staff, noting pride in serving on the Commission.
 - B. Policy Advisor Hoffman announced that Trans Maryland will host weekly legislative policy updates on Wednesdays during the session and shared that a sign-up link would be posted.
 - C. Commissioner Torres-Bolivar shared an update from Baltimore City, noting that the Mayor's Office is hosting upcoming "SYNC" meetings to improve

coordination and networking among community-based organizations; details and dates will be shared once available.

- XII. Closing Remarks: Chair Blinder thanked commissioners for their dedication and acknowledged the extra labor they contribute beyond their day-to-day work. They emphasized the importance of self-care, mutual support, and protecting joy during a challenging time, encouraging members to celebrate positive moments without hesitation.
- XIII. Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 8:00pm by Chair Blinder
- XIV. Minutes respectfully submitted by: Special Assistant, Taylor Harer