In 2023, we watched in horror as state after state passed anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, and we were thankfully able to defeat all of the copycat anti-trans bills introduced in Maryland. In fact, due to the hard work of dozens of advocates—especially the Trans Rights Advocacy Coalition—we were able to provide a shining counterexample in a sea of awful state policy. Maryland passed the Trans Health Equity Act, which guarantees Medicaid coverage for gender affirming care, and Gov. Moore signed an additional executive order providing legal protections for patients and their doctors. Our state also expanded the Attorney General's civil rights enforcement powers and created a commission to study and respond to hate crimes, of which FreeState Justice is a member. FSJ also began collaborating with the Attorney General and Public Defender to develop a suite of recommendations for comprehensive prison reform, including specific policies for LGBTQ+ incarcerated individuals.

In 2024, we are focused on healthcare justice, anti-discrimination protections, criminal justice reform, education and youth policy, and other civil rights issues. We are working to finally remove statutes that stigmatize and criminalize HIV after a more than 10-year fight over the same bill. We're also working to codify protections for gender affirming care, and to respond to a recent state Supreme Court decision that weakened our anti-discrimination protections. We will fight against harmful rhetoric and mean-spirited bills targeting LGBTQ+ youth and students. We are collaborating with advocates and government officials to secure real oversight and other reforms for our criminal justice system. We’re working to make vital documents more trans-inclusive, advocating for healthcare access and affordability, urging state leaders to push their federal counterparts to publish the Equal Rights Amendment, and seeking necessary updates to pay practices for the benefit of workers. And especially after the tragic killing of Meghan Lewis, we support efforts to keep our communities safe by reducing gun violence, stepping up enforcement against hate crimes, and expanding victims’ access to emergency shelter and other resources.

"The General Assembly has an excellent opportunity to continue its work uplifting Maryland’s LGBTQ+ community during this legislative session. The stakes are too high for our state to be complacent, especially since anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and rhetoric dominates in other statehouses. Now is the time for thorough, bold action in this moment of crisis, to transform our state into an example for other states seeking to resist hate and provide material resources for marginalized people."

PHILLIP WESTRY, ESQ.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
FREESTATE JUSTICE

"We can’t be satisfied with an incomplete, piecemeal approach to addressing LGBTQ+ Marylanders’ needs. For the most part, these are not new problems we’re facing. Let’s finally repeal stigmatizing HIV criminalization that disproportionately targets Black Marylanders, address the lack of oversight in our prisons and jails, and make sure our anti-discrimination laws fully protect all Marylanders."

CAMILA REYNOLDS-DOMINGUEZ
POLICY ADVOCATE & LEGAL IMPACT COORDINATOR, FREESTATE JUSTICE