

## Delmarva Pride Center

### Second Annual Town Hall: The Future of LGBTQ+ Protections in Maryland

Cadby Theater of Chesapeake College, Wye Mills, Maryland, and on Zoom

#### Transcript

IVAN COLON: Good evening everyone and welcome to Chesapeake College Also, welcome to everyone that is joining virtually via Zoom. Thank you for joining us today. And welcome to the second annual LGBTQ+ Town Hall about the future of LGBTQ+ protections in Maryland.

It's hard to believe that it's been already a year since the new government took office in Washington. And over this time we have witnessed significant developments, some deeply concerning, involving our community, or LGBTQ+, and some of the protections that we rely on. From the federal government's shutdown to layoffs affecting our community to policies some enacted, some thankfully stopped at the Judiciary and the Supreme Court.

The past year has been a reminder of how fragile progress can be. But that's why it take us this evening, to have the second continuation from last year's Town Hall, the second edition of our Town Hall.

Building on the conversation we started last year, here in Maryland, we are lucky that we have some protections compared to other states. But...But yet, even here, those protections can vary depending on where you live, what schools...What school system, so also...

So tonight, we are honored to bring together a panel of experts who will share their insights on the landscape of legal actions of the past year, and what can we expect in the upcoming years here in Maryland in terms of protections for our communities.

So today, I'm pleased to present our panelists, a delegate Jonathan Smith of the Civil Rights Division of the Maryland Attorney General's Office.

Lee Blinder, the Chair of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQI Global Affairs and Executive Director of Trans Maryland.

And also Joe Toolan, Inaugural Chair of the Maryland Commission LGBTQIA+ Affairs and the Executive Director of... Immediate Past Chair of Annapolis Pride.

And I have the pleasure to introduce our moderator, Caleb Holland. Caleb is an Associate of Weil, Gotshal. He has served in multiple leadership roles within the District of Columbia with the LGBTQ+ Bar Association, and formerly our chair for DoCo Pride, one of Delmarva Pride Center's chapters and also a founder, one of the member-founders of Proudly Cambridge.

So, I'm going to pass to Caleb to moderate tonight's panel.

CALEB HOLLAND: Great, thanks Ivan. Can everybody hear me okay?

The Town Hall...As Ivan said, my name is Caleb, I...am very happy to be here to moderate this panel for the second year. We have quite a few attendees, which are fantastic, thanks so much for coming out. Delegate Kris Fair is going to be joining us. That chair is not a symbolic empty chair, it will be filled. He's on the way, and that's, you know, I apologize for getting started a little bit late, but the traffic is crazy today on the highway...So thank you for your patience. And, I expect that Delegate Kris Fair will be here probably around 6.30, so I assume he will show up and...we will do an introduction when he gets here.

So I have, a couple of quick bios for our panelists, that I'm gonna...read to you very quickly, just to give some context about, their expertise, and their, point of views, and where they're responsible for coming from, and we have questions, later on. You'll see, I do have my phone in my lap. I'm not texting. Well, I actually am, so, but, I'll be getting Q&A questions through the webinar and chat feature from our behind-the-scenes folks. And, I will be sharing those as they come in. So please feel free to use the Q&A feature for those on Zoom.

And for those in the room, if you have a question, we'll have a dedicated Q&A at the end, where I'll be happy to call on anyone. If something's really pressing and you need to know right now, just raise your hand and we'll call on you. We'll take that as it goes.

So I'll start, with Jonathan Smith. Jonathan Smith is the first Chief of the Civil Rights Division of the Maryland Attorney General's Office. The division was created in January 2024, following the party to the Attorney General and the General Assembly to pursue civil rights cases. Mr. Smith has spent more than 40 years practicing civil rights and poverty law. Prior to joining the Office of the Attorney General, Mr. Smith served as the Executive Director of the Washington Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs. Mr. Smith was the Chief of the Special Litigation Section of the Civil Rights Division of the United States Department of Justice, 2010-2015, where he participated

in investigations of law enforcement agencies, prisons, jails, and juvenile justice systems.

Prior to his government service, he served as Executive Director of the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia, Public Justice Center in Baltimore, Maryland, and the DC Prisoners Legal Services Project. In each of these positions, in addition to providing program leadership, he examined individual, class action, impact litigation, and engaged in legislative advocacy and in institutional reform efforts.

Next to John, we have Lee Blinder. Lee is a proud, openly non-binary, transgender, and queer Marylander, and the current Executive Director of Trans Maryland. They're the first openly transgender chair of any Maryland Commission. They chair the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs. Mx. Blinder facilitates Transgender 101 and gender-affirming workplace training for government, medical organizations, and private companies. They have worked in service to their community for 30 years, helping launch the Gender Sexuality Alliance, or GSA, at Montgomery Blair High School in 1996. They enjoy spending time with their adopted animal companions, their cat, Basil Pasta Marinara, and their dog Cupcake.

And then finally, we have Joe Toolan. Joe Toolin is a proud Anne Arundel County resident who grew up in Pasadena, exploring what's behind his home and crabbing on the Chesapeake Bay. As a son of Irish parents through adoption and cultural roots at Guatemala, Joe knows firsthand the strength of diverse communities. Joe serves as the Justice and Equity Fund Director at GreenLatinos, overseeing over \$100 million in grants to community-based organizations to help climate change, clean energy, and conservation. Joe has been a dedicated community leader. He was appointed as the first chair of the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs, serving from 2022 to 2024, and still serves as a commissioner.

He was chair of Annapolis Pride from 2021-2025. Joe spearheaded the first legislative reception to educate elected officials, launch candidate questionnaires to keep voters informed, and build strong partnerships with organizations, including the including the Caucus of African American Leaders and Anne Arundel County Government. Joe also serves as Vice President of Defensores de la Cuenca, an organization that provides multi-generational, community-driven solutions in the Latino environmental community, and President of Adoptees with Guatemalan Roots, continuing his lifelong commitment to uplifting voices too often left out of the decision-making.

So you can see we have a great panel, and I will kick us off with a question for each of you, and we'll go... Any sort of answer about which direction we want to go, but, Joe let's start with you.

So, tonight's conversation, obviously we're going to focus on issues affecting the LGBTQ+ community, with particular attention to Marylanders, and how national developments show up, hopefully. We're fortunate to have this panel, and so what I want to talk about first: From where you sit, what would you consider, as maybe a question that's kind of inverted.

What is the most misunderstood issue affecting the LGBTQ+ community right now?

JOE TOOLAN: Oh. Can you hear me? Louder. Speak louder, okay. Yes, so I think that, there's a couple of major challenges, facing the LGBTQ community right now. And I think one of them continues to be the weaponization against the Trans community right now. I think that we're seeing you know, all of these national debates are focusing on trans people, whether it's trans people in sports. Whether it is teachers who are supporting, the Trans community or immigrants in spaces, things like that that are... I think exponentially, making this problem worse than it is. When you talk about trans people in sports in particular, we know that there are not many.

And so there's this focus at the federal level by the Trump administration saying that women are not safe in sports. When we look at the number of trans people and you know, at that level it just, is not that high. And there are studies that show that, when they are taking gender-affirming hormones, you know, their bodies are changing, and so any of these debates that people are having are not really real.

And so, what we're seeing at that level is really dehumanization of people. And when you're able to dehumanize people, you're able to... And so, I think that's one of the largest challenges, and we really have to make sure that we're showing up our trans community in legal space, because the issue they think they are seeing is not actually real...

CALEB HOLLAND: So, the same question. What do you think is the most misunderstood issue?

LEE BLINDER: Yeah, that's a great question. I think it's really misunderstanding that this is about trans people, right, and similarly to Joe mentioned. I will be louder. I do struggle with projections, so I will do my very, very best. I'm not the loudest, but I am the most tenacious sometimes. So, the misunderstanding is really that this is about

trans people. I'll speak to my identity as a Jewish trans person. So it's really about fascism, and it's about creating a pathway, like Joe mentioned, to follow this particular fascist playbook, where it's a very clear, you know, we're looking at...and students of history, we can look and see, that the playbook is to pick an unpopular minority and pin society's problems on that minority. And that's happening right now. It's happening in the 30s. It's, I don't know, to put it like that, it's easily identified. And so I think the misunderstanding

You know, when we're thinking about how to respond to these issues, you know, this is a very, very small community. We are, as trans people, approximately 1% of the population. I think it's probably a little higher, but, you know, when we don't see positive conditions for people to share their identity, then they often don't. And then there's a lot of people who, you know, I think due to the societal pressures, feel uncomfortable identifying as transgender publicly.

So they might use terms, when they're, you know... I'm both non-binary and transgender, and I often see a lot of people in our community who are like, oh, I'm non-binary, but I'm not trans. That's, you know, folks have more, you know, more strife that they're facing, or they're... if they're not pursuing medical transition, they don't feel trans enough perhaps. So I think we have a lot more people.

And when we're thinking about... you know, how to respond to that, it's very, very difficult to represent ourselves. If we think about, you know, Delegate Fair will be joining us soon, and he is a part of the LGBTQ Caucus in the [Maryland] General Assembly. That caucus has no out trans folks. The entire General Assembly has no out trans people. That means that we are not represented in that sphere. We are also not aware of any Maryland legislature who is open about having a trans person in their family. So... When we're not in the system, it is very, very difficult for people to understand us when we're looking also, as students of history, to the...marriage equality fight.

You know, that was predominantly cisgender, lesbian, and gay folks who wanted to be legal... or to be legally married. I looked young, but I'm 43, so I did work through, you know, that fight and that time. And...when I talked to our legislators, they... and I asked them, do you think that we would have passed marriage equality if we didn't... if we didn't have openly lesbian and gay representatives in the legislature? And they said no.

So the fact that we've passed any trans-specific legislation in Maryland is a huge benefit, and a huge kudos to everybody who has been involved in that. I'm sure many of you in the audience have been, whether it be by providing testimony or just by your

existence, and talking to people, and being physical and present and advocating, so... The misunderstanding for me is really around trans identity and the difficulty is how to represent yourselves among this tiny minority. And when we have so-called left-leaning publications like the New York Times, the Washington Post, doing constant hit pieces on this community. The New York Times, I would very much encourage you to divest your funds from, because they have spent quite a lot of their time both-siding this issue.

And as a Jewish person, there is no two sides view of the issue with Jewish people, there's no two sides to view trans people. We are here, we have existed since the beginning of time, and...you know, our opponents keep making more of us, so we'll be here until the end of time.

JONATHAN SMITH ESQ: So that's...So it's...can people hear me? I've got the... That's the, is this good? Okay, great. Um...It's hard to figure out exactly how much I can add to those our insights, if other than some form of... I agree with everything that's been said. You know, I started practicing Law in 1984. The first person we represented who was transgender was in 1986, who was fired by the United States Postal Service, and we were able to get her job back. I hired my first employee who was transgender in the 1990s. I never thought I'd be sitting there in 2026 worried about a government that was saying that transgender people don't exist, and writing off all of the transgender people I have ever known among the perspective of years out of existence. And so that, I think, is the thing that's just so shocking to me, is this journey that we thought we were heading in a direction that recognize the humanity of everybody, and that we are, you know, this sort of terrifying path, in the other direction.

The other thing I just want to have to share something with me that you said that was really important, is I actually don't think this is about transgender people in particular. I think this is a very cynical distraction, and it is a cruel, sort of targeting of a community that people feel like they can get away with targeting. And it's the continuing of a dehumanization process that does lead towards the kinds of terrorists that you've talked about, and the sort of straight male white supremacy. And we're seeing it across all kinds of the culture wars. And this is the thing that's the wedge in the culture wars, going after, that's...is transgender people. That's not where they'll plan to end, and it really isn't about those [arguments].

CALEB HOLLAND: So, on that note...You know, I think that one of the... as the Trump administration has shown, especially Trump One [first administration], the courts played a huge role in throwing up blocks, challenges, road blocks, you know, being able to slow, slow roll some of them. And I'm not even referring specifically to LGBTQ, you know, specific issues, but generally speaking. You know, the role of the courts is... has

become kind of center stage on a lot of hot buttons issues. So I wanted to ask you, as someone from the Attorney General's office, you know, what are the realistic limits to what, you know, the Attorney General's office can do? And what protections does Maryland law currently provide, and where do people maybe overestimate those protections?

JONATHAN SMITH ESQ: Sure. So, no, I think you're... and I... would be... On behalf of the [Maryland] Attorney General...but the comments I just made reflect more personal [opinions]. I don't speak on behalf of the Attorney General's Office on these things. Although I know this is an issue about which he cares extremely deeply about and it is, protecting the LGBTQ community and the trans community is a priority for the [Maryland] Office of the Attorney General. He's said that privately, he's said that publicly, and he has put his personal, you know, credibility on the line, and the office's resources in that direction.

LEE BLINDER: Can confirm.

JONATHAN SMITH ESQ: I will... I will let him know. This is something he feels very... he does feel very deeply, deep down. I mean, there's a lot of barriers, this is one of... one of the top points for the [Maryland] Attorney General, and certainly for the office as a whole. So I think... Please... I... the...Sorry to sputter here, trying to figure out in which direction to go. There's sort of two parts to the question, to answer the question, I think. One is...So what have we been able to do in the last year? I mean, how have we responded to what the government has done? The Attorney General's office is... participates in a large coalition of Democratic Attorney Generals across the country.

It's actually some Democratic governors, like Pennsylvania, in a statement that the Republican Attorney General in... to put it back on the Trump administration. And there's been some success in doing so, and so...We have been involved in, and are currently involved in litigation, trying to challenge the [federal] executive orders, we're participating in litigation to try to stop the use of this...power that is being used to try to intimidate, healthcare facilities from providing care, to change the first thing, to actually get medical records of people who've received care. We challenged the declaration that Secretary Robert F. Kennedy just recently promulgated that, an issue that was... has been abused against healthcare providers, because there's no proven basis for whether it was, to...care.

We've supported the litigation here in Maryland that PFLAG brought against the executive order. And we're commenting now and preparing to litigate around the [federal] Health and Human Services regs and what's coming out of CMS with regard to

restrictions on the use of Medicaid for transgender care. So the trans service has actually been able to stall across the country, been able to successfully use, of course, just trying to, would need to stall and put breaks on what the federal government, what he's doing.

The arguments that we've been able to be making in those cases have fallen largely into the categories of whether the federal government has the authority to do what it's doing under the law. And we're relying on the statutes that were enacted by Congress and that Separation of Powers about when does Congress get to act, and when does the Executive get to act. So on some of these things, we're going to win in the end, and what we've seen from the Supreme Court is that on a lot of things, the Court has given the Executive far more power than traditional, so we don't know how some of this is going to ultimately shake out.

We also don't know what Congress is going to do. They often will change the law to justify some of these actions later. So, what has been really important is that we've been able to slow the [Trump] administration down. And the courts are an incredibly useful tool for doing that, but that is just buying time for there either to be a social movement that is going to act as the ultimate authority for the legislative action at the state level, which is going to provide additional protection. So that's been important on the federal level.

The other thing I would say is that, the other sort of source of federal law, which we have been turning to, has been the protections in the Constitution, and whether or not there are equal protections that could be used to try to stop what the Trump administration is doing. We had a very discouraging week this week in the United States Supreme Court. For those of you who follow constitutional law, the...Traditionally, sex has been entitled to protection that is above the, sort of, the ordinary regulatory process of the courts, but not the same as race or other protected categories. The government can't actually distinguish between sexes unless there is a heightened reason to do so, and a justification, and it is never in favor to do so.

What we saw coming out of the Supreme Court is that they're going to be giving new notice about protections for transgender people. It's going to be a rational basis test. If the government has any reason to regulate they're going to be able to go away. That's what the Supreme Court is going to do. So that increases the need for us to create protections at the state level. Good news is on the anti-discrimination area, we have very strong protections in state law and policy areas in which we can improve them. We have very strong protections under state law, and even in some of those places where we interact with federal law, we have very good statutes. So our Medicaid statute, for

example, under Maryland law requires the availability of a broad range of services that are, transgender healthcare services that are available, and that it's enumerated in the statute. That's going to come into conflict with them.

So the interesting question that we're going to have to hopefully resolve as a government, is do we continue to provide those services using state funds? Are we able to fight back against the federal government to use federal dollars to do that? And certainly there's legal strategies and theories that we would employ, including anti-discrimination provisions under the...Act. Or, are we gonna have to find some other way we do to address the needs... the healthcare needs of our entire community through those statutes. And so, we're looking at a, I think, a very complicated year coming up, as these... as the... particularly the regulations are coming out of HHS, and we'll be able to slow those down through litigation, because then it... actually, some of what is being proposed is contrary to the Medicaid statute itself.

But it's only going to be a matter of time before we have these issues come up and we decide how to proceed with these issues.

CALEB HOLLAND: That was a lot of really good information that I think a lot of people wanted to know and want to know more about. I want to take a moment to introduce Delegate Kris Fair, who has arrived. I have a short little bio that I'll read. Delegate Kris Fair is a dedicated civil rights advocate and community leader with deep roots in Frederick County. After being elected to the Maryland House of Delegates as the first out-gay state-level official from Western Maryland, Kris founded and is the chairperson of the Maryland Legislative LGBTQ+ Caucus.

In addition to delivering impactful legislation for Frederick City, and for managers across the state, he works full-time as the Executive Director of the Frederick Center and LGBTQ+ Resource Education, Outreach, and Youth Center in downtown Frederick. Is that so true? Okay, just wanted to. So, thank you for joining us, really appreciate it, and right on time, because you were teed up on my next question. I'm not making that up. So, from a, you know, what you've missed, basically, my first question was, what would be the, the most misunderstood issue kind of facing LGBTQ+, the, you know, our community at this time. But I'm gonna dive right into the legislative side of things for you. So, from a legislative perspective, what are the most immediate policy priorities or risks affecting LGBTQ+ Marylanders right now?

DEL KRIS FAIR: So, great question. Thank you, everyone. Apologies for being late and I enjoyed the tour of the campus so much I did it twice. So yeah. So...So, our biggest concern is what we found is that the [Trump] administration specifically is very good at

breaking things, and figuring out how to kind of go in very clumsily, and kind of just go in with a sledgehammer and try to figure out how to break as many components as possible. And why does that matter? We know that that's happening. Why does that matter at the state level? What we are most worried about, what I'm most worried about... oh, sure, am I not... I have never in my life been told that I can...

CALEB HOLLAND: To be fair, no one has said anything. I just noticed the microphone being there...

DEL KRIS FAIR: So, for me, the biggest... I would say the biggest challenge, facing, especially Maryland's queer community, is looking at the potential tiny, fissure-like gaps that live inside of our state laws, that can be exploited when somebody acts as recklessly as the federal government is acting. If I have to sit at one more meeting having to listen to people go, well, we never anticipated, we never expected, we never thought, et cetera, it's exhausting. And so, my... our biggest concern is where are those gaps, how big are they? How can we close them as quickly as possible? And so, luckily, we have advocates, we have the Attorney General's office, we have all kinds of individuals looking to try to find each and every one of those gaps.

The question becomes, when we identify them, do we make a big brouhaha and make sure everybody knows that we're pushing this forward to try to pass legislation? Do we try to do it quietly, so that we don't draw ire from anyone else, or maybe illuminate an issue that people shouldn't know about, because we don't want the federal government to know that it exists. And so, until we can get something fixed, until we can get the fix in place. And so, that's been my biggest anxiety from a state policy perspective, is how many of those little gaps are there, and how quickly can we close them, with drawing as much... as little attention as possible, because we do not want, the federal government to start fielding those questions.

CALEB HOLLAND: Yeah, so, kind of following up on that, when... in your experience, what often slows progress. Like, when, you know, you identify a gap, or something that needs to be fixed, or you're in losing pace, is it politics? Is it resources? Is it public understanding? Is there anything that you can identify that would be, you know, kind of a constant frustration?

DEL KRIS FAIR: I would say that the biggest thing that I pick up on, at least, is people's, I think, and I think it's good-hearted intention, that things are the same as they've always been, and that somehow the world is operating the same way that it was 2 years ago, or 10 years ago, or 15 years ago. And the fact is, it's really not. And so, they look at things and they go, well, that's a really big... that's a pretty substantial step.

One of the bills that I'm working on has to do with, with a health fund deal, with trying to subvert the administration's attempt to pull away our Medicaid money. And people are like, well, that would be the largest expansion of the healthcare program that the state has administered ever in our state's history. Are we at that time in our, in our community's, you know, lifespan? And I'm like, I can't tell you that we absolutely are, but I can tell you that we're as close as I've ever felt in my lifetime, and so I am truly anxious about these things, and I think that folks are just...I don't know if they just want it to be the same, like, they feel like, you know, internally, they just desperately want that sense of normalcy, or...

Maybe because they're not necessarily the community directly under threat, that they don't sense that, the urgency of now, that we need to start acting now and doing these things at this moment. So, I can't... I can't tell you exactly what it is, but I can tell you that it's certainly... you feel it when you walk into rooms sometimes and make big pronouncements of trying to do something of that nature.

CALEB HOLLAND: How would you say, constituent engagement comes into play in these types of conversations. Do they move the needle? You know, is there...something that you could kind of say to, you know, folks in the room that's saying, this is really helpful, or, you know, make sure you keep calling, or, you know, put your energies elsewhere, you know, like, what... how did... how did you, interpret, kind of, like, the community aspect?

DEL KRIS FAIR: Yeah, and it's very complicated, because especially for queer people who have lived experience, who understand these issues so deeply, not just emotionally, but intellectually. They walk into a room, and they see folks, and they say, you know, hey, you should support this, and here's this really well-researched, logical, data-driven, like, passionate argument about why you should join, why you should do this. And then the elected official's like, okay, I got it, and then you never hear from them again, and they don't do anything with the bill, and you're like, what on earth happened?

And so, when I talk to advocates, I'm always stressing, like, we have to take all of our well-intentioned, great thoughts and really intense... and we have to boil it down so that people who aren't in our community, who are frankly not going to be experts on this subject, possibly ever, but genuinely want to do the right thing.

I... a vast majority of the folks that I talk to, I'll say, at least in the Democratic Caucus, will want to do the right thing. Understanding why this is the right thing? Amongst the 10,000 other right things that you're going to go in and talk... they're going to be

hearing about over the session. There's going to be...I think our LR, "legislative request," that is the number of bills that have been requested so far, the General Assembly just crossed 3,000 today.

So... The Attorney General's Office has to analyze all the ones we passed, so that causes him grave anxiety, knowing that he has to... that many bills. So we just passed 3,000 legislative requests today, so remember when you're walking into that legislator's office. We have to be able to explain why this issue right? Above the other issues that they're gonna hear, all that noise in their head. You gotta cut through it and get to them about why this one is so critical to them, them and us. Right? Why, if we're talking about doing the right thing for Marylanders, whatever that is, that this is the... this is the pathway that will take us there.

And it's not the only answer, again, because there's going to be multiple bills, always. There's gonna be multiple pieces of legislation. You're going to go back to that office every year, and you're going to go, I got two, three more for you, and they're going to go, my God, you're always back! And you're gonna be like, yeah, it's almost like the work never ends, right? Because if we would have solved government, it would have been... we wouldn't be in legislative session every year, right? We haven't figured it out yet. We gotta keep working out.

CALEB HOLLAND Yeah, exactly. And I think that, you know, the aspect of this that it is always a work in progress. Kind of, you know, there's a friction point there about the urgency, because you have, you know, two kind of schools of thought of, you know, well, we need to do this right now, but then at the same time, you know, you're trying to work with the systems that are in place, and with the people that have been there, and, you know, trying to, work with their, you know, preconceived notions, what are our intentions, you know, whatever that may be.

Something that I wanted to kind of circle back on a little bit, and this is one question for, Lee and Joe. You know, we talk about people falling through the cracks, and we talk about gaps, and Maryland, if you, you know, if you Google, you know, in doing some research for this, you know...On paper, Maryland has pretty strong, laws on the books and policies for the LGBTQ+ community, vis-a-vis other states, especially, you know, if you look at how other places do things.

But I've, you know, what I think, you know, what I'd like to talk about, or, like, the question I'd like to ask you, where do you see gaps? Because, you know, you are seeing people on the ground as you're having the conversations, and you are kind of boots on the ground, in a sense. I hesitate to use a military analogy. But, you know, what are the

things that you think are not getting enough attention, understanding that there's been some overlap, I think we already talked about. And also, I want to give you the freedom to respond to anything that's been said in the last few minutes.

JOE TOOLAN: Yes, I think there's a lot of things that, I want to touch on, actually, at this time. I think in Maryland, we do have a lot of protections in place, and there are challenges. The one thing that I'll say, and I'm gonna say it because I'm the only person on stage right now... Wednesday, the attack on our immigrant community right now is absolutely at a level that you've never seen before, and...you know, I've been saying this for a while, you know, Renee Good, unfortunately, was killed, and it's the first time that white citizens saw somebody of their own be killed by this federal power without any repercussions at all.

And so, while we've been watching Black and Brown immigrants being shoved on the ground, dragged to detention centers and disappeared, it's the first time that white citizens actually feel like this could affect them. And so, especially for immigrants who are part of the LGBTQ+ community, it's really hard. I can't tell you how many, especially Hispanics in Annapolis are part of the community who are scared to leave their houses right now.

ICE within Annapolis this week. I know of at least seven apprehensions that happened Tuesday morning, and, there's some local restaurants that have not been open since then, because people will not come to work. And so, there are a lot of counties that have agreed that their law enforcement will not work with the federal administration, and that should change in the entire state, and I hope that it does.

Well, on this... maybe a couple more things on this question in particular. The implementation of a lot of these policies takes a very long time. So in Anne Arundel County, we, in 2021, passed the Safe and Inclusive Schools Policy for LGBTQ+ students and teachers. And a coalition that I'm part of, we meet with Anne Arundel County Public Schools pretty much every month at this point. And there are still challenges with implementing this policy. Years later, it's been, what, 5 years at this point?

We know that in the older school buildings, it is really difficult for administration to find a space to have a gender-neutral bathroom. In some of those schools, they might have one key for a bathroom that they have designated as general control, and a student would have to walk down to the front desk to get the key to go to the bathroom. And it might not be a bathroom isn't a safe place for them to show up as themselves. And so, the implementation of policies is something that has been really difficult to kind of do, and because all of our school boards across the state have differing levels of

protections, it's really hard for us to guarantee that students are going to be protected, okay?

Another big challenge that we're seeing right now, because of some of the cuts at the federal level, is HUD is being defunded. They have less money than ever, so we know that affordable housing vouchers and programs, like many particularly affect low-income and LGBTQ people, are drying up. And so, how do you ensure that those people are going to have safe and affordable housing? We don't know. In Anne Arundel County, again, there's a woman, Pam Brown, who does a study for the [Partnership for Children, Youth, and Families].

This year, it showed that there was more homeless people in our county than we've seen in a very long time. Some of them are living in hotels or motels. They're not really identifying themselves with homeless, but if you're having to stay in a hotel or a motel, you don't have an actual home to go to. And in the northern part of the county, their preliminary study showed that there's about one-third of the youth in our program are part of the LGBTQ+ community.

Data is another challenge, and so this might be a good place to pass it to Lee, too, because we're doing a lot at the State [LGBTQIA+] Commission to try to help fill some of those gaps, but I will share that there isn't a lot of data specifically around the LGBTQ+ community, so now I'll pass it to Lee.

LEE BLINDER: Thank you so much, Joe, and really thank you for, you know, making sure that we're identifying all the intersections around identity, I know identity is a thing that we talk about a lot within ourselves, and also certainly on the Commission, concept, and I think I... what I want to say, I'm, you know, a bit known, you believe me for, you know, never being shy about my opinions. And those opinions are informed, you know, by the experiences that people are sharing. Just the same as Joe, we are having people come directly to us, and, also as a student history. So, what I will say is that, and this is not my own unique idea.

I'm in many ways, echoing, Chase Strangio, are you all, please raise your hand in the audience if you're familiar with that name. Okay, cool. So, Chase Strangio is the first openly trans attorney to argue in front of the Supreme Court. And so the Bostock Case that provided, you know, protections on the basis of sex and gender identity, those were protections that Chase, amazing other advocates, were involved in the kind of huge production that it can be to argue a case in front of the Supreme Court, helped us secure.

And, the case that is... was just in front of the Supreme Court on Tuesday about the ability for transgender girls to participate in sports, Chase is also involved. So, and Chase is a trans person, and he works for the ACLU. And so Chase is, like, you know, very, very clear. Chase is one of those very unique lawyers. I don't know how many of y'all spend time with lawyers, but I found that lots of lawyers like to impress other lawyers, and I'm like, cool, that's great, and I love that for you, but what the heck are you talking about? Chase is excellent at distilling down very complicated legal concepts and make them accessible to the community. So Chase will talk to the community, as opposed to, trying to impress other lawyers, and I always appreciate that, because I am not a lawyer. Although I spend a lot of time with them. So, the thing that Chase has said is that the courts will not save us.

And I would go a step farther to say the legislature will not save us. And that is not because I think that we're bad people. But it's all about people identifying themselves with the community. And when we are not represented in that legislature, when we are not represented in, our courts...we have no openly transgender judges in the state of Maryland...And so what Joe is talking about with white folks, like myself, you know, finally seeing ourselves in the challenges that are being faced by our immigrant community, which includes trans people, and includes care people, as Joe mentioned, you know, it's not real to people.

And, you know, Delegate Fair was mentioning that we have to, as advocates, tailor our responses, and that is true. But what I will say is that...when we look at history, and that's where I'm so lucky to have had a very robust Holocaust education. Because most white folks like me, particularly in the trans and queer community, this moment now is when they're losing their faith and their government, because they felt, you felt like the government...you're for me. The law generally protects me. If I have a problem, I'll go to solve that through legal ways. But for me, I am lucky enough to know that your government can turn on you at any time. And not only will your neighbors, dear legislators, not care, they can turn you in themselves. Your family. Our trans and queer kids who are kicked out of their house, they know your family can turn on you because they became homeless because their family turned on them.

And so, I say this not to scare people. But I say this to say that we are going to have to change functionally, how we think about change. We're so lucky to live in this state. We have refugees from around the country moving here to Maryland because of the protections that we have, if they are leaving the country. Every trans person I know is having that conversation. Many... I know many, many people who have left. And I know many families of trans kids who are there because they have the resources to.

Now, some of us are staying here to fight. For our existence, and for our state, our country, for the reality that we deserve to be here. And some people can't go. So some people could go, but are staying, and some people don't have the resources to go. Or they have a reason and can't go. There's, you know, shared custody of a child, or an elderly parent who can't be moved, etc. Or a job, they're going to... they can't get a job, you know, in another country.

So, the reason I'm talking about those things is that we are so lucky to be here in Maryland, but we have not had to fight like our siblings in other states. And so, when I'm thinking about resources, and I'm thinking about exactly where we should be focusing, I do a lot of legislative work. Systems often listen to me because of my whiteness, masculinity, etc. I'm assumed to have a college degree, sometimes an advanced degree. I have none of those, that I've had access to two parents with master's degrees. I was able and lucky enough to be self-educated, so it's often taken seriously in those systems. As far as a trans person who's saying, we need more, can be, but I've said that all last year, and we didn't get any change for the trans community specifically, while we were under attack from the federal government, And that is because...the system is already happening.

And so, when our legal system or our legislative system are going to fail us, you have to make these connection with each other. Connections, mutual aid. It's the folks in Minnesota who are, like, building barriers in the street, who are banging pots outside so ICE can't sleep at night. That's the kind of things that are going to be necessary for all of us.

And it's us who'll get each other through this. So that is not the question you were probably hoping to ask, you know, or have the answer. But, you know, I'll take a minute.

CALEB HOLLAND: Well, I mean, I think one thing in particular that, you know, both of you have touched on were... was the issue of data, and getting accurate reporting statistics, and... and my research for this event and for the Town Hall last year, this came up, equally as much, issues with reporting. And if the reporting mechanism system is that, you know, it has to go through the police department, that discourages some people from reporting, or if it does... if that person is brave enough to go and report, it disappears on the desk somewhere, or, you know, nothing ever comes of it. And so, on paper, it's like, oh, well, I mean, such and such county (won't say anybody by name), we don't have any of that here. You know, it's kind of that, that, that dynamic.

So, you know, one of the things that I was hoping that you could address tonight, and then, you know, feel free, anybody who has to, you know, has thoughts. What can we,

you know, realistically do about that? Is it a legislative fix that we change, you know, how the reporting is done? Is it a, hearts and minds, I mean, not to sound, you know, cliche, like, what is it? I mean, because again, you know, from my position as someone who you know, researched these issues and prepared for this event last year, doing it again this year, I'm hearing the exact same things. So I would just kind of, as, like, a general topic of discussion, what would that look like? How do we get that better data to make better decisions?

JOE TOOLAN: I can start on a couple of thoughts. And, just for a little bit more background, I currently sit on it's called Multidisciplinary Action Team within Anne Arundel County, focused on hate crime in particular. And that's a challenge for a lot of people in our community, because again, there is not, historically, a lot of trust with police in our communities. I don't even need to go until why that is, hopefully, to this group. But I can tell you, in that room, we sat down, and there were people from tons of different backgrounds that are sitting in that room together. There's representation from the county police, city police, county agencies, lots of different nonprofit partners and community activists.

Anne Arundel County, received a federal grant, actually, called the Shepard Byrd Hate Crime Grants to implement public information about reporting the crimes in our county. And part of that, we found, is that people don't trust police. And so, how can we accurately say that you have the right information for how many crimes are being reported, so...We decided that we're going to be making our own... sorry, yeah, speak louder.

We're going to be making our own system that will directly report hate crimes to the Hate Crime Action Committee that we're on so that we know that it's happening. That system will give people the option to then, after we review it, send that information to local police departments if they feel comfortable. And the reason for that right now would be we don't have enough data about the marginalized communities to find out what is actually happening in our spaces. We all have stories.

One of my stories is that, the night before, Annapolis Pride, I was walking down Main Street in Annapolis with two other gay friends, and some guy drove by in a car and yelled the F-slur out the window at all of us. During Pride Month, when there are pride flags hanging up and down Main Street in Annapolis. I did not know at the time, this was a couple years ago, that that is a hate crime, or a hate incident, I should say, not a hate crime, a hate incident, that could have been reported to the police department.

And so then the challenge is, well, how do you get people to know that they should be reporting hate incidents and crimes? And then what's gonna happen? Because the reality is I believe there's data, and I... don't quote me on the data, but when those are reported, it is very hard to then prosecute whoever was involved in that, and see actual, repercussions. And so, we're doing everything we can in Anne Arundel County to fix that system. But...it's a challenging situation, and so I think, you know, in the past, I've also been in situations where we've tried to bring together community leaders with, for example, the police department. So we did ask for there to be an LGBTQ liaison at the Anne Arundel County level and at the Annapolis Police Department level.

And we now have both of those things, but that doesn't mean that every single police officer at the county and at the city is aware of how to interact with LGBTQ people, especially trans people, and are going to treat you with respect. And so, there is room for more conversations like that, but a lot of people still don't.

LEE BLINDER: Yeah, in terms of data, so Joe was mentioning earlier that the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs has been working on data, and we did a community needs assessment that was open for 2 months at the end of last year. And where we were collecting information about LGBTQIA+ plus Marylanders experiences, including with hate bias incidents, but also down people's experiences in healthcare, etc. Every time I'm putting up our new flyers, which will be around somewhere, I'll talk about at some point, for our policy meetings, that it's taking down our mission, community needs assessment flyers. And... We had a lot of folks who were very concerned about filling that form out. And I understand that.

You know, it is a time when we both need data or we have data. The Maryland Trans Survey we did at TransMaryland in 2023, we had responses from every county in the state. So, "that doesn't happen here, but it's, you don't have, you know, that community here" is untrue, and demonstrably so. But that data has dropped, resulted in increased funding for community organizations and for services that this community desperately needs. It hasn't resulted in trans people to... well, the trans community is under attack, passed trans-specific legislation, last year. And it hasn't resulted and caused people to, feeling more safe as a result of that deadline.

And when we're trying to collect additional data, people are telling us they're very concerned about themselves. Where does it go? Who will have access to it? You know, how is it being protected? So we're in this unique situation where we have data that nobody wants to acknowledge. That we need more data, will anybody acknowledge that? And then we have folks who are terrified to share that data with us, and I feel like, rightfully so.

And... you know, we all work in systems in different ways. You know, policing was a function that came out of slave patrolling, right? So is that a system that will be helpful for our community, you know, to, have our liberation? I don't think so, but, you know, when we think about our system, the problem is that you're reporting a crime to a body that also largely does not consist of our communities. When I talk to LGBTQ liaisons in police courses, they're almost exclusively cisgender, gay men, or lesbians. They're not trans themselves, and it took them 20 years to come out in the police force, and I'm like, well, why? And then if the answer is because of bias within the police force, and there still go out trans folks in the police force, then bias is still present. And if we don't have that out officers, then we certainly aren't going to have we're not going to have, reports taken seriously.

And then what is the result, that that would incarcerate someone? I don't know if you've, checked out our carceral facilities, but they're not exactly a place where humanize people. So, we're punishing people, but there's not a rehabilitation process. And our LGBTQI+ folks who are incarcerated are facing some real nasty situations. You know, where folks are housed incorrectly, where they're not given appropriate care and medicine, etc. You can check out hearings. They're pretty brutal, but I say this because we have these conversations about what are the things that happen, but we're interested in societal change, and we also... Joe is building a different system to care for each other. Because the system that exists is not working. So as we're working to build this world that we want to exist, while still having to grapple with the systems that we have now, so I would encourage you all to have a critical lens. What we spend our time on, and how we accomplish those goals.

JONATHAN SMITH ESQ: So I don't think I said, sure. Some of what I was gonna say, you picked up...Any kinds of reporting system, it's designed to feed into the criminal justice data system, and it's not really designed to do, kind of, policies changes that have been taken. That's why it goes through the fire marshal or the police department. So this fire marshal gets the report, so then it's the police department that's supposed to get everything else. It all gets fed into a state police Fusion Center Database, then you take the data out. So it's not really... then if you look at the data, you would know that the very rural parts of the state are absolutely hate-free. And that Montgomery County is the hotbed of absolutely horrible racism and xenophobia and family... So, because it's purely about the way reports, get submitted in Montgomery.

So from, you may see that having a criminal justice system design database for policymaking on all these issues is probably not the right place for us. I think that the other thing that we haven't talked about, which is troubling, is the war on the

academics, and what's happening with the academic thinking around these issues. People may have seen, just yesterday, the Dean of the Law School for the state of Arkansas, was offered a position. Well she signed a brief in this, written by 17 law professors, arguing that, transgender, she mentions that there are people who count the heightened scrutiny of the Supreme Court, and she lost her job as Dean of the Arkansas School of Law, and that's happened around the country, that is not a unique situation.

I've if you're...recently with the academic year at one of our senior year, which is in DC. He's got a 20-year longitudinal study called...The second... first generation immigrant Jews, by which there's enormously important data on gender identity, and she will not publish. In addition to research language for this. And that is what this warning has been done. We're getting deprived of these incredibly vital research. And so, at the state level, maybe this is some conversation. Data collection is complicated. And it's expensive, and so we have to be very careful, I would say we need to get quality data in order to make policy.

But as we see what's happening, the federal government's got a war on data, it's not just in the academy. We're seeing that the CSOL Department Opportunity is going to stop collecting race, gender, and gender identity data. They're going to get rid of the EL15 data, which is, you know, through...64 app used to collect this data that has allowed us to understand the behavior of employers and, how they can, how they treat protected categories. We're seeing that, that the, you know, both...the EEOC has told the Maryland Civil Rights that, if they investigate claims, involving gender identity, that those claims will no longer be compensated under the contracts in front of the EEOC.

So we're just seeing this... the federal government is definitely... the Department of Education's government said they are not going to collect data in schools. The Department of Education's collection systems are, you know, essentially a crutch, particularly as it goes to secular education... So, understanding even the picture where we've had these sources as imperfect as they've been...up until now, even those are going, going away. And the best data is since that's been collected on our registrations.

So, you know, our organization...You know, if you talk to you know, any of the identity groups, whether it be to the LGBT, Jewish, Muslim, NAACP, you know, if you're getting reports of hate bias incidents and hate crimes, you know, it's tens or hundreds of multiples of what's going forward to the official systems. And so we just get out of that...is what we know about what's actually going on in our communities. And building policies, it'll be very difficult with that much quality of data.

CALEB HOLLAND: Delegate Fair, I'm gonna move into the Q&A portion, but I wanted to get a good chance to respond.

DEL KRIS FAIR: Sure, I don't... I mean, everything that's been said so far is spot on. And I would just add that this is, what I'm hearing from this conversation both sides here. I mean, I look at the, Maryland Department of Health, biannual youth risk behavioral survey that they do, which, by the way, still doesn't collect data on trans individuals. And I see that data as such a eye-opening experience for so many people. We use that data for LGB students all the time, or sexual minorities, all the time when we are talking to school systems about how, their systems aren't working for the students that are queer in their schools, and we understand that a certain percentage of those students don't... what a high level of percentage not identify is heterosexual and cisgender, which in the average in the state of Maryland, just in case you don't know this information, the average percent of students in our K-12 system currently who do not identify as heterosexual and cisgender is about 25%.

So, any of you that are old enough that grew up and remember the 1 in 10 we used to always hear? Yeah, let's try again. Not 1 in 10, 1 in 4. And so, we're not talking about small populations of community members here, we're talking about big [populations of] community members, but that's one piece. The government piece is one piece. And yes, we need to be focused on that, and how we're doing a better job here in the government as far as collecting data. Nonprofits are doing their part to kind of collect that information, but there are... in my role at the Frederick Center, we sit on 34 committees and commissions. 34!

Everything, and I just couldn't help but think when you first asked the question, like, the thing that popped in my head was the value that we were adding to select data around sexual orientation and gender, gender identity, specifically to collect trans identity information, was so critical for our Child Fatality Review Board, which we never in a million years, nobody up to that point had thought, "boy, we should really probably get some of this intersectional information here as to how all of this is connected." And it was critical to the work that we do there on the Child Fatality Review Board. But there are dozens in your community in Easton here.

There are dozens of committees and commissions that need advocates to sit on those committees and commissions and say, "hey, are we looking at these issues through these lenses, but moreover, are we collecting the information that's needed to be collected to understand the impact of the programs that we are providing?" "And what are the positives, and what are the gaps, and what are the negatives that we're doing?"

CALEB HOLLAND: That's, that's great, and, actually is a good segue into, one of the questions that came in. It says: "Joe mentioned the difficulty in getting LGBTQ affirming laws and policies implemented across the state, what can our state leaders and us as citizens do to ensure the full implementation of legislative initiatives?" So, you know, is that...showing up to these, you know, to the committees, and, you know, what does that look like? What is something that, you know, kind of an action item that, you know, people could take away as something that we can get traction? So if you don't mind I'll start with you Kris, the legislative side, I think that more...

DEL KRIS FAIR: There's two components there, and Joe did a really great job of pointing out one of the biggest headaches of all. So, when we got our shielding laws in place to protect gender-affirming care, and then had to go back last year to make sure that we actually protected all the areas of gender-affirming care, because there were some gaps, again, from my earlier comments, that were identified thanks to the [Maryland] Attorney General's office, that we were able to then close those gaps. So we... shielding means that other states or the federal government cannot come in and collect your information, or come into a hospital in Maryland and say, you need to turn over the patient records for this individual. They are shielded under very specific circumstances, and it's called legally protected health care, so it protects reproductive care. It also protects gender-affirming care.

And so... One of the big challenges we had was with implementation. The law itself, listen, we went, we advocated, and I'm frustrated as anybody, because there was, you know... The caucus had a lot of legislative priorities last year. We only saw about half of them get through. We want to go back and re-advocate for more, and try to fight again this year for more. The answer to that question about how to pass legislation is, absolutely show up to the test and testify. Written testimony is super helpful, not just with the pro bills that we're doing, but also with the bills that hurt our community. Listen, Maryland is more than likely going to shoot down any bill that harms the queer community, because we do a lot of work behind the scenes to remind people why we protect LGBTQ plus people, but that doesn't mean we don't show up at all.

So we show up for bills that harm our community to tell... remind the legislators that it harms our community. We show up and testify for bills that are supportive. We call our local legislators, and we say, hey, this is important to me, and I really hope that you'll support it. The implementation portion is the more complicated one of the two. We need... we always need advocates who are willing to go the extra mile and contact the regulatory agency or the institution and say, where are we at? And then when they say, "oh, we're on it," following up the next week and saying, "where are we at?" And following up the next week and saying, "where are we at?" Now, we do that as

legislators. They keep us in contact, and this was a good example with this gender-affirming shielding bill, where they were reaching out to us, and so we're messaging the commission that is charged with writing the regulations. And we're like, where are you at? Where are you at? Where are you at? We gotta get this done, we gotta get this done, we have to get this done. Blew past the deadline that the General Assembly set. Have you missed the deadline for actually producing the answer? And that's frustrating, right? It's super frustrating.

But we need people to stay on... Once we pass the bill, what I have found, at least in my experience, is a lot of people like to go down, get a picture with the governor, yay, you passed the bill. There's a whole process that follows that. That a few people actually track, and so the implementation piece is as critical because we also don't exactly know what that implementation's going to look like.

And so when you're watching it, when you're looking at it, when you're watching those hearings, when you hear that commission start talking about "what is this policy going to look like in regulation?" That's your opportunity to weigh in. Make sure they're not missing the holes. Because Lee did a great job of pointing out, there ain't a lot of trans people in state government, something I certainly would like to see fixed. And so, they, meanwhile, are passing laws that impact your day-to-day lives.

And so you need to show up in those meeting spaces and say to them, "hey, you're missing the point, you're missing something. "You have a gap here. You put a gap in." And if you see it, I'm not putting the responsibility solely on your shoulders. It's all of ours to bear that we should be doing better. But I'm saying, if you're looking for action items to do, don't just look at the legislative side, look at the implementation side, because it's a strong area where we could be stronger and more effective admins.

CALEB HOLLAND: Yeah, and I, that kind of ties into another comment we got, which...I think I'm gonna give to Joe. "Can we set up a phone tree activation system where when someone needs to report something to the police, that a team of us show up together?" You know, what I would like, you know, maybe it would be helpful if, you could explain a little bit how the, you know, the... what you were describing was the mechanics of that, like, how does that actually work? And, you know, maybe that is a model that could be sold elsewhere, but I personally would like to know about just how that works.

JOE TOOLAN: Yeah, so the... the system that we're implementing in Anne Arundel County, it's... it's an online form that you would, you know, find the link to, and it's... it's a survey, you know? Looks similar to SurveyMonkey, it's through Anne Arundel

County's own internal system. And so that's a way to... a way to report things. I think what really we're seeing right now, and really maybe where I'm going to take this a little bit, is the ways in which we can get to action quicker, because I think that that is the ongoing challenge with a lot of these things is that, you know, we're not taking the next step to continue to see change for better. And so... For example, like, when you're seeing issues with implementing a policy in schools. The reason why our group is, like well-poised to, you know, make those, asks of the county is because we have a coalition that includes students in our school system, teachers in our school system, administration in our school system. And they have a space where they can come and talk about those issues with the group, and then the group leaders go and report it, so that nobody feels like their identity is maybe on the line when X, Y, or Z thing is being reported. And then we can go and have these conversations.

It takes time to build trust, to have those conversations, where people feel like they can come and be themselves, and then it also takes time to build those relationships with whatever entity, government, that is implementing those things. So, you know, we started out saying, "hey, we have this group that has these issues. "We need meetings." It didn't happen right away. It took a long time for us to get in front of people, but now that we've done it, they are willing to meet with us every single month to talk about how to change what's happening.

When it comes to reporting, the other network that we're seeing right now, when it comes, for example, to, like, immigration issues based in our communities, is that there are groups that are forming that are mainly using apps like Signals and Newgate, where you can say, "hey, this is happening in my community right now, we need people to go out and show up." And so what happened on Tuesday in Annapolis is, that group got activated. And by Tuesday afternoon, when students were going home from school, there was a network of mainly white people who said, "we're gonna walk home the Hispanic and Latino students, because their parents felt uncomfortable to come pick them up from the schools.

And so, those type of systems are going to be the things that I think we need to get more creative about as we move forward, because that's the real way that we're going to be able to frankly, like, come back from, the challenges that this administration is... is working on. And we need to be willing to work with each other. If one person is attacked, the rest of the community needs to be there and stand up and say, "you're attacking somebody in our community, and none of us are going to stand for that." And those are the systems that we need to administrate for a change.

CALEB HOLLAND: I want to take a minute just to, kind of open it up to the folks in the room. No pressure, of course, but if anybody's comfortable and wants to...

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you all so much for putting this together. I'm a social worker and an ally and I'm blessed to work at Chase Brexton. My question does not represent Chase Brexton. I think...As a social worker and therapist, I'm... I'm here on the shore, but I serve folks across the Chase Brexton continuum, which reaches into Frederick County. How do we cultivate hope in our clients who feel the heaviness of this world, as well as my colleagues. What thoughts or suggestions do you have in that cultivating because that's so essential...

LEE BLINDER: I really appreciate that question, and generally I try to talk to folks a little bit more about joy, because often so much of what we're talking about is not so joyful. Now, I wanted to ask real quick, if folks feel comfortable raising hands, who here feels afraid right now? Okay. So... The entire point right now, by this regime is to make us feel afraid, to overwhelm us, to have us incapable of feeling like we have personal power and agency. And I think, you know, Jonathan was mentioning, you know, this, horrible situation where, you know, the head of the law school lost her job for supporting trans people.

And often people think, like, "oh, Lee, you know every horrible thing that's happening to trans people across the country." Oh, no, no, I do not. I make a very concerted effort to focus on what I have influence over. And I really encourage people to, where possible, throttle the amount of information you're getting, have your trusted sources. You know, nobody wants to feel out of touch these days, because we're all very worried. But even if it's only because you don't, like, out of spite, frankly... If you can avoid giving this regime that power over you, it is so, so important. So I would talk with your clients and your staff, like ourselves, you know, I talk with my team. You know, when we go to Annapolis, a lot of people there are there to advocate on behalf of communities that aren't them.

And what that means is that those of us who are there for ourselves, you need to go home and the work is not done. I'm still trans at the end of the day. When I get in my bed, I'm trans. When I get out of my bed, I'm trans, like, my friends, a lot of trans people. So, this is all around me. I don't have off time from being trans. But I do have off time from work.

And, you know, the advice from our elders who went through the AIDS and HIV Crisis is that you better find some joy. You better find some...go out and dance, if that's the thing that your body will do for you, like...Find some way of accessing joy, because

every time we do, it is in direct opposition to what they want for us. They don't want us to have joy. So every time we're having joy, they lose. The potential of that! So if, you know, however, whatever mental tricks or, you know, little tactics that you want to use to make this...Sometimes folks are really... are sitting with the lot.

So even if you don't want to do it because you don't think you deserve it, do it because you're denying them their desire, which is for us to be miserable. And we refuse. Like, sometimes people are like, "oh, this really good thing happened and I don't want to like, take up space because it's a sober time." I'm like, please tell me your joyful thing. Every time we have an amazing, like, a win, or we're going out and we're, you know, having joy, like, folks...during the AIDS and HIV Crisis were crossing off names every day, every name, like, in their address books, my friends are dead. And you ask folks how did you get through that? And they tell us because they're like, "I just went, "I went out dancing and tried to forget for a little while."

And that's so, so important. So, that would be my advice to you, to any of us, is that we have to double down on joy. Do not spend every waking moment following every horrible thing. Do not spend every waking moment telling everybody else every horrible thing. But really try to find your whatever, if it's crocheting, if it's writing, if it's watching dumb TV, like, whatever it is, do that thing. Because that is how we subvert this, and also how we build power with each other through connections.

You know, when we're... not everybody has to go to the legislature. Sometimes, when there's, like, a protest against ICE, somebody wants to feed everybody. That is also the work, taking care of each other in whichever way is accessible to you. And that is empowering. It's why we do it, because we're taking care of each other. And that's how we get through it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Caleb?

CALEB HOLLAND: Yes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I lived through certain age, you know, all of this, so I've been out for decades, and I have a 31-year-old non-binary trans child, licensed psychiatrist...His spouse was a Catholic child. I'm thinking, I'm so grateful that we live in Maryland. I'm up in Chestertown. My child is Western Shore. Do you know that? That we talk about you guys as the Western Shore? But the fear, my child's talking about moving overseas. I fear... Are Maryland was strong enough to protect us? Jonathan, I remember you saying...because I am in fear that my family is going to be destroyed.

JONATHAN SMITH ESQ: Sure. It's tough to answer that question after the following weeks, at this junction for all of us. So the answer is yes and no. So...I mean, just... I should have said this earlier, I brought some materials, free a document with the discussion of the rights of...of Maryland, please take it. It's on our website, it's when you go to the free delivery. I don't want to take any of these back. Somebody take them who thinks there are people who might want them. And I think that's one of the most important things I wanted to sort of think about in terms of that, was that if we don't enforce our rights then we might as well not have them, right?

It's absolutely critical that we know those rights...that we have. And Maryland has some very powerful laws. Maryland is in some ways a sanctuary place is our country and...some of the work that I do when I talk to parents and the people who are under 19, who are transgender and female students, there is a whole community of people that are moving to Maryland because of our protections and our laws. And we should be proud of that as a state, and just, a wonderful system.

And, so it is critically important for what exists in the versions of our laws, that they are real, and they can be used in, to provide protection. And there is enormous fear, I think, in coming forward and enforcing those laws because of what's happened on the national level, with significant denial particularly of trans people, but of LGBTQ+ people across the spectrum. So, that's a realistic portion...I've been, for the last year, been really focused...What we're going to do is focus on trying to identify the discrimination that's taking place at the Maryland Attorney General's office instead, and we bring those cases. In those cases, while we know that discrimination is happening, those cases are not coming to us. I think that that's a natural and normal distrust of government. And it is a fear that standing up for queer rights will draw attention to...We're completely sensitive and understand that, you know, much more work we need to do to, to overcome some of those barriers.

The federal government has a lot of power. The federal the government has a lot of power to say we can do nothing about it, and we're seeing this happen, playing out in Minneapolis right now...The Supremacy Clause in the United States Constitution... [TO LEE] By the way, I am exactly that lawyer you talked about with Chase. [LEE AND JONATHAN FRIENDLY BANTER ABOUT LAWYERS] Very effective...I should say.

But in any event, The...you know, the Supreme... the Constitution of the United States says that the federal government has some authorities over the states, and the states cannot interfere in many ways with what the federal government decides to do. We spend a lot of time these days, talking about what if Baltimore, or Prince George's County, or Hyattsville, or somewhere else becomes what's happening in Portland,

Oregon, or Los Angeles, or Chicago, or Minneapolis, and what we can do is limit... what we can control is what the state and locals do. I mean, there's... that's... there's another guidance document up on our webpage, and just... we're going to instruct police, "you cannot violate state law [in the service of the] federal government." You... so I... that doesn't mean you can stop the for doing what it's going to do, and the circumstances under which we can charge a federal officer for filing the law: we can bring a lawsuit against the federal... those are just... we've been successful in some areas, but... and you saw them in Los Angeles and Chicago in particular, they were able to successfully stop some of what the National Guard was doing, which is illegal, but it's been very hard to stop ICE, to control ICE. And we're seeing the same thing with regard to the, you know, cutting the funds, all kind of... so, the answer is good news, bad news. You know, we... we have very robust laws, and there's things that are just state interests that are happening in the state should be protected.

Where that intersects with what the feds are doing, that's where we're gonna be in trouble and we're going to have to fight...

LEE BLINDER: So...it is so clear that you love your child. And your child is going to have to pick if they want to stay or if they want to go. And everything Jonathan mentioned is true. And that uncertainty for us as white folks is really new to us. They're snatching our immigrant community members regardless of what they've done. I don't think anyone should be incarcerated the way we incarcerate people for any crime, because that doesn't sound like human. But they're just snatching people, sometimes U.S. citizens, under the guise, just because they're brown. And after they're done with that, with continuing it, they're gonna add the, the next community.

So, it depends on how we respond. And your child just has to pick that... that choice, like, if they want to flee. Again, I know so many people who have left the country. There's so many people I've seen. And I wish there was, like, a better, you know, way, but every person has to, hopefully, luckily, have the finances to choose that option.

But there's really...It's such a heartbreaking situation to be in, and I've talked to so many parents just like you. So many parents who are afraid for their children, especially parents of trans youth. They're facing, like, my kid, how am I gonna get medical care? Will I have to leave the country to go to the doctor, you know? So I think the thing that I would encourage you to do is, like just know and trust your child, that they'll pick the option that's the best.

And I know that, you know, the work that you're doing to support, the work that is put in to support your child, that's what's going to give them the power to make the best

informed decision, because parents like you are... are...the best possible setup for that... their child to [be safe]...Those parents can throw their kids away, I always tell them, I was like, we'll catch your child, but they will never be the same.

CALEB HOLLAND: Delegate Fair, would you like to add to the question?... I saw you there.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I have a question, that's okay. Maryland provides a lot of protections for trans people as far as, sex basis. Very much appreciate that. What I'm interested in seeing is how much is that carried over into the penal system? Incarcerated people, or, or, like, arrested. For example: I'm arrested because...The answer is yes? Does not apply to trans people?

LEE BLINDER: There are no trans people housed according to affirmed genders in the Maryland correction system.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Okay so can we change that? DEL KRIS FAIR: So, that's a great [question], and I just want to lead in with that, segue into that, because that is a great question to ask. It's something that, for any of you that weren't watching Maryland politics in the last month, because you literally had anything that was more interesting to do than that, you might have missed that Speaker of the House resigned on December 2<sup>nd</sup> and a new speaker was elected by the body on December 16th. Now, you might say, why is that important? Because what the speaker, the new speaker, who is the first immigrant in the country to head a statehouse government, who is Afro-Latino, and who is one of the most learned, educated, compassionate human beings I've ever had the great privilege and benefit to know is now leading our House of Delegates.

She reformed all of our committees. And the piece that people maybe didn't pick up on in this process was she decided to build a new subcommittee that never existed prior. So she moved a few people over from the Judiciary Committee over to the new Government, Labor, and Elections Committee, and she created the Corrections Subcommittee.

And that's a subtle note in governments speak, that's the way a leader says, I'm not happy about a lot of things. So we have a lot of issues in our corrections system, and I can't even pretend to begin to dive into the deep, deep issues that go on in our corrections system. I can tell you, we have children being murdered and molested. We have adults being murdered. We have prison guards committing horrendous acts against inmates.

And then, we also have issues around our trans community, as Lee pointed out. No trans person in our state corrections system is in the affirmed prison system that they, with their gen... with their gender, and that is all problematic. And even if they were, there are very few public accommodations built out to actually let that person live with dignity and humanity inside of that...inside of that corrections system.

The speaker, by creating a subcommittee specifically for corrections, has said, without saying one word, "I'm not happy. "I want our corrections system to be doing it right by its citizens." So, can I promise you that it's getting fixed? I know that there is a group, an advocacy organization, and the regulatory people in the corrections system that's trying to fix your exact issue through regulation.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Okay, so they're aware of the issues.

DEL KRIS FAIR: They're aware... they are aware of it and they're trying to work through regulatory so they don't go through legislation. I have been standing by... I try to always let, you know, this isn't my issue as a cisgender man, it's not my issue, so I try to let trans people lead on this. If they want legislation, I would put in legislation tomorrow. But they're working through the regulatory framework, they're trying to fix it through regulation, and make sure that it then gets passed down.

Sometimes that's the best method to do things. Because if you fix it through regulation, you have the corrections people basically saying, "we're fixing our own problem," which means they're more likely not to drag their feet and create all those implementation problems that Joe... Joe and I were just talking about earlier. And so, it's an important process that we need to follow.

And we all have our role to play in it. My role is with the legislature, and if I need to come in with a bill, or find one of my colleagues to carry a bill, that's my role in this, to make sure that it comes into case. But I will say, the speaker is hyper-focused on some areas, and if you looked at the subcommittees that she built, you definitely started to sense the areas that she is particularly frustrated about that haven't been focused on, and I promise you, without ever her saying it to me, corrections is part of it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

JONATHAN SMITH ESQ: I just want to add in regards to litigation.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah...

JONATHAN SMITH ESQ: The state has been sued.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yes, yes...

LEE BLINDER: And will be...continue to be.

JONATHAN SMITH ESQ: Yes. I have my own views, but I can't speak for the [Maryland] Attorney General.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: That's my second question. How closely is Maryland collaborating with other like-minded states, such as New York, California...

JONATHAN SMITH ESQ: On corrections, or generally?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: In general.

JONATHAN SMITH ESQ: Oh, very closely. There's a... there's a, there's a state... a multi-state coalition, that, literally meets every day to talk about the federal action. It's called the Project for Federal Accountability. We started working it's sort of a three-tiered project. It's a committee structure. I co-chair the ... Justice Committee. There are a range of other committees that holds up to a daily call, and then the AGs meet on a daily basis.

So, to me, we're now involved in about 45, 46 pieces of litigation as a coalition. I think 6 of them in one way or another, you know, relate to, the demographics on transgender people over the to HHS grants, or the United Service Members, etc. So it's... well, I know we got it. We know we got it, but we're doing a lot of work in the space, and generally, that coalition has been, you know, very effective to be able to work together. That said, I think that, you know, his point earlier is right, courts are sort of ultimately not going to save us. It's a place where we can slow things down.

But it's been required, ultimately, remember, Trump One [first administration], we were unable to stop completely the ban, the Muslim ban. But they eventually got it... Of course it's a very, very, very important strategy, and it's critical when you're doing that work. But we...you know, it's not always so great. The other thing I would say, just so, relevant to this point, it...

You know, as someone practicing law for the last 40 years, one of the things I've realized is part of my job is to be extremely successful in the courtroom. You've got to

be best lawyer in the courtroom because the law's against you 90% of the time even when you have a good lawyer. But it's also about changing the narrative. It's an important role that a lawyer plays, that all of us have to play in changing the narrative. They have been successful at seizing the narrative, and we hear it, it just got pounded upon us.

And that's... standing up for that narrative and correcting the narrative and telling the truth of the narrative is critical. And so if you're... Through the litigation, in addition to just wanting to win the argument, making the rest of the argument... But it's critical also to tell the story right? When you have to really talk about what is really at stake in a fundamental and critical way, even if it's not in our shoes, it's how they talk about it, the basis.

DEL KRIS FAIR: I'll just say, too, I'll just add quickly to two organizations. So, this summer, at the National Conference of State Legislatures, we began the process of building an LGBTQIA+ Caucus that represents all the open and out individuals in all the state legislatures across the country in order to try to coordinate better with legislative initiatives. We get a lot of our legislative initiatives by looking at other states and the successful efforts that they've had, and a lot of people look to Maryland to get their ideas for their legislation.

At a nonprofit level we go on to an organization, an association called CenterLink, which is a national association of LGBTQ Centers. That association has a Public Policy Subcommittee, which the Frederick Center sits on, and so... boy, I'm sure if I pulled out my phone right now to know there would be...messages, but it is LGBTQ+ centers from across the United States, Mexico, and Canada, so the entirety of North America. And they're just sharing information, making sure that we're aware of the recent... anything that's recently happening or coming down the pipeline. And we're able to then message, create messaging, and move forward faster and more efficiently. So there's a lot of organizing behind the scenes that I think are going on right now.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you.

CALEB HOLLAND: We're, yeah, we're, like, mega over time...

JOE TOOLAN: I'm just gonna say one final thing, because I think we're at the end of our time. I'm actually...for more things. But, I think what we're hearing a lot here today, too, is that it's really important to get involved at your local and state level. And so my reminder to this sort of feeling like you don't know what you're gonna do, or you don't

know how you're gonna do it, it's an election year. It's midterms in Congress, it is, state and local elections this year. And so, vote in the people that you really believe in.

And my other reminder on this implementation piece a little bit, is if you have somebody who you voted in who is not being responsive to community needs, is not representing you the way that you want, make sure you hold them accountable as well. So, vote this year. That's my final thought.

CALEB HOLLAND: Thank you everybody. I want to thank everybody for coming, especially our panelists. Can we have a round of applause...It's been a really good discussion, and I want to thank all of you personally, for coming and for, for sharing your experiences and your expertise, and for providing information that people need. And, you know, sometimes that information is scary, but, do you need it in order to be prepared? And I think that's what we all want. I think that's why we're attending events like this, is to be prepared. And sometimes that involves understanding things that are scary. So, I appreciate the candidness and the...discussion and...appreciate it.

So, I, just, I think, one final note for me personally. Lee and I were texting earlier about our algorithms, and on the, on the topic of joy, you know, you can... you can reverse engineer your social media presence. So, if you're not happy with what you're seeing, which is what I was saying earlier, that I don't go on social media anymore, because everything I see there just...right, you know, just 0 to 60, like, you know. But you can... you can manipulate your algorithm back. Find the cat videos, like them, comment on them, you know, find the videos that, that speak to you and like them and engage with them, and you'll start crafting your algorithm in different directions.

So I'll just leave you with that. Kind of, you know, choose joy, find it, seek it, and, you can kind of create feedback, too, so that will reinforce that. So, thank you all for coming, thank you for your questions. Really appreciate it, and maybe we'll see you next year. [APPLAUSE]