



Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in  
Parks and Recreation through changes  
to Policy and Programming

Presented By: Lauren Pruitt, Esq. ~ FSJ Legal Director





## Vision

We envision a Maryland where people across the spectrum of lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender, and queer identities are free to live authentically, with safety and dignity, in all communities across the state

## Mission

Free State Justice is a legal advocacy organization that seeks to improve the lives of low-income lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) Marylanders.

- We are a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization
- Our office is in Baltimore City, but we work **statewide!**
  - You **don't** have to be in Baltimore or have an issue there for us to help
  - We often work with clients over the phone or via email
- We do all kinds of work
  - Free legal services—name changes, discrimination, expungements, family law, and more!
  - Policy advocacy
  - Community Outreach, Education and Training
- You can find us online at [www.FreeState-Justice.org](http://www.FreeState-Justice.org)
  - If you need our help, go here to complete our intake form or call (443) 977-4254

# Lauren Pruitt

(she/her)

## *Legal Director* FreeState Justice

- Earned a BBA from Howard University- 2002 studying International Business and COBIS
- Earned her JD from the Georgetown University Law Center- 2005
- Member of FreeState Justice team since January 2019
- Member of the Maryland State Bar Association, National LGBTQ+ Bar Association, and the Alliance of Black Women Attorneys of Maryland, Inc.



# Inclusivity: Why it Matters

- It is estimated that about **4.2%** of Marylanders identify as LGBTQ+
  - Nearby in DC the numbers are even higher – **9.8%**
- Social discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals has been associated with psychiatric disorders, substance abuse, and suicide
- It's policy
  - *The facilities of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources are available to all without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, national origin or physical or mental disability. – MD DNR Website*
- It's the law
  - State Government Article §20-304 ([MCCR](#))
  - Gender Dysphoria has been recognized as a disability under The ADA

# About those Laws...

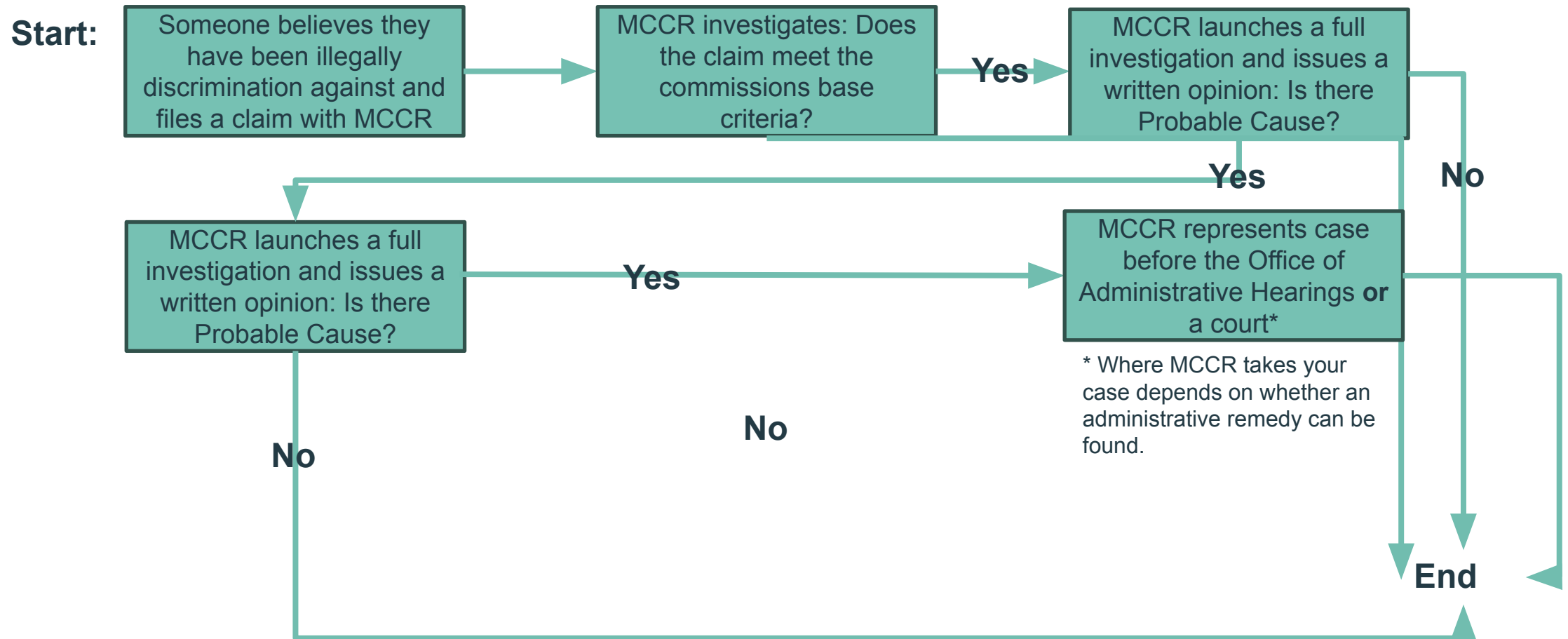
- Maryland has a **very** broad law prohibiting discrimination in public accommodations
- Owners/operators/agents/employees are prohibited from discriminating based on:
  - sex
  - sexual orientation
  - gender identity
  - marital status
  - disability
- Public accommodations include
  - recreational centers
  - government facilities


# Enforcing Civil Rights

- The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights enforces nondiscrimination laws
- If someone believes they have been discriminated against they can file a claim with MCCR
- The MCCR *may* conduct an investigation which *may* result in a lawsuit



# The Lifecycle of an MCCR Claim





Question: What do you  
feel are barriers to  
LGBTQ+ inclusivity in  
parks and recreation?



# Barriers to Inclusivity

- The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) recognizes that parks face obstacles to being inclusive
  - Insufficient funding
  - Inadequate staffing
  - Facility space shortages
  - Lack of staff training
  - Lack of understanding
  - **Apathy** from the general public or local government
- Our goal is to provide training that increases understanding
- Apathy can be addressed by promoting inclusive practices and programs



Question: What makes  
you feel included or  
welcome somewhere?

# What does inclusivity look like?


- Inclusivity means making everyone feel welcome
- It's more than simply not excluding people
- For LGBTQ+ folks inclusivity can look like
  - Using someone's preferred name and pronouns
  - Using gender-neutral language where applicable
  - Wearing a pin or nametag with your preferred pronouns
  - Having gender neutral bathrooms
  - Respecting someone's gender identity in athletic settings
- Inclusivity should be both a policy and a practice



Question: What do you think Maryland Parks and Recreation is currently doing well regarding inclusivity

# Names and Pronouns

- Many people, especially trans and nonbinary individuals may want to go by a name other than the one on their birth certificate.
- Use a person's preferred name in every place that you can
  - If you must use the name on someone's birth certificate or ID for an official document and it doesn't match their preferred name, make a note of their preferred name as well.
- Pronouns are a way of referring to someone without using their name all the time
  - The big three are he/him, she/her, and they/them but there are others
  - You should always use someone's preferred pronouns
  - If you are unsure of someone's pronouns, ask them—most people are happy to share
- When introducing yourself it's a good idea to also share your preferred pronouns



Try it: Practice introducing yourself with your preferred name and pronouns to one or two people close to you

Say something like “Hi! I’m [*your preferred name*] and I use [*your preferred pronouns*] pronouns.

# Inclusive Language

- Using inclusive language shows that you recognize and respect the possibility that someone identifies as nonbinary or is in a non-heterosexual relationship
- Opt for gender-neutral terms when appropriate
- For example, try saying
  - Parents instead of mom and dad
  - Siblings instead of brothers and sisters
  - Partner or spouse instead of husband and wife
- It's okay to still use gendered terms in some situations
  - If someone refers to their father or their sister, you can use these terms with them
- When in doubt or in a group, use the gender-neutral term



# Gender-Neutral Bathrooms

- For trans and nonbinary folks, using the bathroom can be a stressful experience
- Having gender-neutral bathrooms can alleviate this stress by
  - Eliminating the need to choose a bathroom based on gender identity or sex assigned at birth
  - Managing expectations of other bathroom users, thus reducing the likelihood of harassment
- Gender-neutral bathrooms can be single-user or multi-user
- There is no evidence that having gender-neutral, multi-user bathrooms puts people at an increased risk of harassment or violence

# Gender-Neutral Athletics

- When possible, make athletic activities open to everyone regardless of gender
  - There is little evidence to suggest that athletic activities need to be separated by sex or gender
  - Often-cited concerns about “safety” or “fairness” are typically based on outdated stereotypes
- Activities for young children are better if they aren’t separated by gender
  - This breaks down stereotypes about natural strength and competitiveness
- If an activity must be separated by gender:
  - Let trans and nonbinary folks participate in the group where they are most comfortable
  - Most of the time this will be the group that most closely matches their gender identity

# Pro-LGBTQ+ Programming: The Benefits

- Provide opportunities for physical activity and healthy living for LGBTQ+ people
- Community-level LGBTQ+ support associated with **reduced** odds of lifetime illegal drug use and smoking
- More frequent LGBTQ+ events among a community is associated with a **decreased** odds of substance use among adolescents
- **Increased** self-resilience, self-esteem and quality of life for LGBTQ+ youth

# Potential LGBTQ+ Programming

- Pride Camp
  - Youth-focused intervention building resilience and promoting health equity
- Community Events/Awareness Campaigns
  - Events should be year-round, not just during Pride Month
- Social Activities/Programs such as sports leagues
- Youth Groups for LGBTQ+ Youth and/or Mentor Services
- Gay Straight Alliances
  - Also known as Gender and Sexuality Alliances



Question: What kind of pro-LGBTQ+ programs would you most like to see implemented?

# Recommendations

- Update existing inclusion policies to address LGBTQ+ inclusion
  - Outline inclusion goals
  - List accommodations that the parks have made to be more accessible
  - Note how specific accommodations can be requested
  - Ensure consistent guidelines and standards regardless of staff, leadership or funding changes
- Provide regular training on inclusion policies and best practices
- Collaborate with **LGBTQ+ Organizations**
  - These organization may be able to help advertise events
- Host LGBTQ+ focus groups
  - These groups can help communicate the most current needs of the community

# Best Practices

- Be as gender-neutral as possible
  - Use gender-neutral language
  - Enable trans folks to participate in sports comfortably
  - Provide gender-neutral bathrooms and single-user/family-style changing rooms
- Ensure family programs such as summer camps and child-care programs acknowledge and are cognizant of all family units
- Be vocal about inclusivity
  - Communicate that parks are a safe space for LGBTQ+ people
  - Advertise inclusive programs
  - Use signage to promote inclusivity





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# Questions? Need to Contact Us?

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