

Thiru's policy framework for fighting discrimination and protecting the civil rights of LGBTQ+ citizens in Baltimore:

- 1** Promote LGBTQ+ owned small businesses, entrepreneurs, and city districts
- 2** Enable services to account for challenges facing LGBTQ+ youth in Baltimore
- 3** Prioritize inclusive workplace policies and trainings for all city employees
- 4** Appoint an official LGBTQ+ Liaison within the Mayor's Executive Office
- 5** Address the needs of at-risk LGBTQ+ populations including veterans and seniors
- 6** Protect transgender citizens from crime and discriminatory police enforcement
- 7** Improve and expand health services for members of the LGBTQ+ community
- 8** Broaden LGBTQ+ Commission's responsibilities to include training and privacy-sensitive data collection for evidence-based policy making

Thiru, an advocate and ally, led the drafting of a report by the Maryland Attorney General, *The State of Marriage Equality in America*, which was cited by the Supreme Court in its landmark decision, *Obergefell v. Hodges*.





Vignarajah Declares Solidarity, Announces Plans to Make Baltimore Most Inviting City in America for LGBTQ Community

Our city has a vibrant and proud LGBTQ community. Thiru is dedicated to safeguarding their rights and fostering diversity and inclusivity within Baltimore. While Baltimore has made progress, members of the LGBTQ community continue to face systemic discrimination with regard to healthcare, housing, education, and employment, as well as in their day-to-day lives in the forms of stigmatization and outright violence. Thiru stands as a proud ally to the LGBTQ community and will work with local leaders to promote policies that account for the reality that discrimination manifests itself differently depending upon race, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Thiru's policy framework will focus on a range of issues important to Baltimore's LGBTQ community and aim to break remaining barriers to full equality, including:

1. Promote LGBTQ-owned small businesses, entrepreneurs, and city districts
2. Enable services to account for challenges facing LGBTQ youth in Baltimore
3. Prioritize inclusive workplace policies and trainings for all city employees
4. Appoint an official LGBTQ Liaison within the Mayor's Executive Office
5. Address the needs of at-risk LGBTQ populations including veterans and seniors
6. Protect transgender citizens from crime and discriminatory enforcement
7. Improve and expand health services for members of the LGBTQ community
8. Broaden LGBTQ Commission's responsibilities to include training and privacy-sensitive data collection for evidence-based policy making

1. Promote LGBTQ-owned small businesses, entrepreneurs, and city districts

Baltimore must invite small businesses and create business alliances across the board. That said, it can take steps to specifically assist and accommodate local LGBTQ-owned businesses as well. Thiru will incorporate LGBTQ-owned businesses into the incentive programs that function through the Office of Minority and Women-Owned Business Development, in order to rightfully acknowledge their role in providing services to the citizens of Baltimore and in creating a more inclusive, diverse space for community. Building on residential and commercial districts that serve and celebrate LGBTQ culture, Thiru will also prioritize city and private investment in welcoming, inclusive neighborhoods.

2. Enable services to account for challenges facing LGBTQ youth in Baltimore

Protecting LGBTQ Identities in Schools

In April of 2019, the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners passed [Policy JBB](#), which ensures that transgender students have access to the restrooms of their preference and are referred to by the right gender/pronouns in class and on official documents and records. To make Baltimore's public schools even more inclusive, Thiru will establish LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and support LGBTQ youth anti-harassment campaigns.

Catering Homeless Shelters to LGBTQ Youth

According to a recent study, roughly [40%](#) of the homeless youth population in the United States identify as LGBTQ. Thiru will employ the Mayor's Office of Human Services to equip Baltimore's pre-existing homeless shelters, along with transitional and supportive housing, with the resources to best serve LGBTQ youth, such as increased counseling staff, tailored job training, and access to health services.

Founding a LGBTQ drop-in center

The Department of Health and Human Services shows that LGBTQ individuals are far more likely to experience clinical depression and are roughly three times more likely to complete suicide. For these reasons, [New York City has just pledged 4.8 million dollars to opening a new 24 hour drop in center for LGBTQ youth](#). Baltimore should follow the example of other cities and create its own drop-in center. The center would unite resources and actors, like schools and community organizations, around our LGBTQ youth.

3. Prioritize inclusive workplace policies and trainings for all city employees

Discrimination in the workplace is an unfortunate reality for many in the LGBTQ community. Baltimore City Agencies must take proactive steps to combat prejudice against their employees. In an effort to increase accountability and establish a welcoming, respectful environment for LGBTQ employees, Thiru will implement mandatory and recurring inclusivity training for city employees, beginning with new hires. The city's existing LGBTQ Commission will head training efforts. In addition, Thiru will require there to be at least one gender-neutral bathroom in all city-owned buildings and adjust city government forms to include gender neutral language and non-binary identities.

4. Appoint an official LGBTQ Liaison within the Mayor's Executive Office:

To increase the awareness of LGBTQ issues within the mayor's executive office, Thiru will establish an official LGBTQ Liaison. The LGBTQ Liaison will convene with community members, local organizations, and relevant city entities to learn about the issues that Baltimore's LGBTQ people face every day. The liaison will review city policies and services, communicate to government leaders when proposals fail to meet standards for LGBTQ equality, and serve as a resource for constituents who want to bring LGBTQ-related issues to city government but hesitate in fear of dismissal or misunderstanding. The appointed individuals would collaborate alongside the city's existing LGBTQ Commission, its selected Chairperson, as well as the Liaison Officer within the Baltimore City Police Department.

5. Address the needs of at-risk LGBTQ populations including veterans and seniors

[Veterans who identify as LGBTQ face increased health risks and unique challenges in health care.](#)

Thiru will lead Baltimore in conjunction with the Veterans' Commission to collect data on LGBTQ veterans and provide them with the appropriate health benefits and services. He will also employ legal experts to aid veterans who were wrongfully subject to discrimination during service or the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy upon discharge.

Thiru will also strive to aid Baltimore's senior LGBTQ population, who are more prone to health issues and suffer from rising housing costs. He will prompt the LGBTQ Commission and LGBTQ Liaison in the Executive Office to advocate on behalf of the senior LGBTQ population, push for affordable housing options, and inform senior-care facility managers, employees, and residents of relevant anti-discrimination laws.

6. Protect transgender citizens from crime and discriminatory enforcement

The nationwide surge in violent hate crimes against the transgender community is both heartbreaking and unacceptable. [Baltimore has seen multiple incidents of transphobic related violence.](#) Thiru will work with the LGBTQ Commission Chairperson, the LGBTQ Liaison to the Executive Office, and LGBTQ Liaison Officer to bolster relationships between law enforcement and the transgender community. Further measures include 1) requiring the LGBTQ Officer to submit statistics and reports on LGBTQ-related crimes to the Mayor's Office, 2) monitoring the Police Department's fulfillment of and training related to [Policy 720 \(2018 draft here\)](#) and 3) incorporating recruitment of LGBTQ individuals into Baltimore's police force within crime policy proposals and halting discriminatory practices such as unnecessary trespass and loitering arrests.

7. Improve and expand health services for members of the LGBTQ community

Mental Health

[LGBTQ individuals, especially youth, are more than twice as likely to suffer from a mental health condition compared to non-LGBTQ identifying individuals.](#) Thiru will provide more accessible and affordable mental health services tailored to the LGBTQ community under a new mental health program within the Baltimore City Health Department. This initiative will create a new LGBTQ-specific mental health hotline and foster partnerships with school counselors and youth centers/organizations to provide mental health resources where currently insufficient.

Appropriate/Inclusive Treatment and Care

Often a doctor's office can be an uncomfortable and vulnerable space for LGBTQ individuals. Thiru will encourage efforts to provide inclusive medical care to members of the LGBTQ community, following models similar to Johns Hopkins' "Embracing the Rainbow" program. These initiatives will encourage respectful communication between LGBTQ patients and medical professionals, and emphasize training focused on gender-neutral questioning and non-binary options to medical inquiries.

Partnerships with Health Professionals

Institutions such as the Baltimore City Health Department and the Mayor’s Office of Human Services will partner with local healthcare providers, state and federal agencies, and community groups to promote LGBTQ health and foster efficient collaboration. Health issues such as HIV prevention and treatment will receive particular attention.

8. Broaden LGBTQ Commission’s responsibilities to include training and privacy-sensitive data collection for evidence-based policy making

In early 2018, Baltimore City passed an executive order to create a city-sponsored LGBTQ Commission, which comprises 15 community members who offer insights and recommendations to promote the prosperity of LGBTQ Baltimoreans. This executive order was a vital decision to further equality-driven policymaking, but there is more we can do to integrate and support the Commission. Thiru would expand its responsibilities, while ensuring access to required resources. The Commission would lead research on issues pertaining to the community and manage inclusivity and diversity training for city employees and external parties.

Too often we fail to collect LGBTQ specific data to inform the allocation of resources, rendering the massive disparities experienced by members of the LGBTQ community — particularly transgender people — invisible to policymakers. With the Commission’s help, Baltimore can study, investigate, and close the gaps in health, income, and well-being outcomes that the LGBTQ community experiences, collecting data that respects individual and community privacy. Involvement through government or third-party training, in schools or medical facilities, will heighten the Commission's visibility and fulfill an essential arm of community outreach.