

## **"You might as well call it the GBTQ Commission"— Lone lesbian pushed off Baltimore committee**

The Baltimore LGBTQ Commission's Law and Policy Committee recently held an emergency meeting aimed at eliminating lesbian representation on the Commission. Several women who are longtime residents of the region attended on the evening of December 4, 2018, to support the woman targeted by the meeting, twenty-five year-old Julia Beck. Julia has stated that her reasons for seeking this advisory role are unequivocally and unapologetically woman-centered: "I joined Baltimore's LGBTQ Commission to represent lesbians in local government," and to "defend the rights of lesbians as homosexual women." Julia is the only lesbian on the Law and Policy Committee, and possibly the only woman on the entire Commission willing to publicly state that lesbians are female homosexuals.

As the meeting progressed, however, it quickly became clear that anyone who expresses this view is explicitly unwelcome on Baltimore's LGBTQ Commission. Although the question of Julia's role on the Commission is not yet resolved, the writing is on the wall: women who love women *might* be entitled to representation on the Mayor's LGBTQ Commission, but *only* if they pledge adherence to the belief that males have a right to define themselves as "lesbian" and as "women" for all legal and policy purposes.

The emergency meeting was scheduled in reaction to Julia's views about policing and detention policies for women and trans-identified males. Julia had expressed the view that trans-identified males in correctional facilities deserve a safe separate space away from the general population, but that they should not have the right to be incarcerated in women's facilities (where women may be forced to [shower](#)<sup>1</sup> and sleep with them), or to force a guard who is a woman to handle their male genitals in a strip-search. In the meeting she reiterated this position, citing the horrific case of [Karen White](#),<sup>2</sup> an admitted rapist and trans-identified male who was allowed by UK prison authorities to be housed in a women's prison based on his self-declared "gender identity," then harassed, intimidated, and sexually [assaulted](#)<sup>3</sup> several vulnerable women.

### **Trans-identified male pushes to oust Julia because of her disagreement with gender identity ideology**

The push to eliminate Julia from the LGBTQ Commission was initially spearheaded by Ava Pipitone, a male trans activist who dates women and identifies as a "female," "lesbian," and "[transbutch](#)."<sup>4</sup>

Ava argued in the meeting that Julia's views about the safety of incarcerated women are "aggressive," "dangerous," and, in an earlier email sent to the committee, "violent," and accused Julia of undermining efforts to eliminate prison rape. As another example of a "dangerous" policy Julia supports Ava cited Julia's insistence on "centering this concept of biological sex," and went on to characterize Julia's political analysis of the sex-based oppression of women and lesbians as "anti-trans views."

Ava claimed that "trans-inclusion" does not hold back women's liberation, but at no point did Ava acknowledge that the female bodies of incarcerated women make them vulnerable to rape and violation of bodily privacy when forced to be in intimate settings with male prisoners. In fact Ava refused to acknowledge that females have *any* distinct interests worthy of consideration. Instead, Ava simply erased those distinct interests by declaring that males who self-identify as "women" and "female" must be treated as such for every conceivable purpose—even sexual orientation. "Not to mention," Ava added, "there's like this whole concept of a cis lesbian versus a trans lesbian; like, come on now. I'm a

lesbian. I've been in lesbian spaces for many years. All women who date me are lesbians, and this feels like infighting."

Ava's opening statement concluded with the proclamation: "I don't really feel that we have to say too much to build a case" for voting to eliminate Julia's role on the committee. "If we had bylaws for the LGBT Commission that said it has to be LGBT-inclusive, she wouldn't satisfy those. Simple."

### **Trans activists offer no coherent explanation for their theories about sex and gender identity**

In her own statements Julia gave a concise and coherent explanation of her political analysis of sex and gender: Sex is just about the two sexual reproductive classes in human beings; women generally produce eggs and grow babies, men generally produce sperm. Very rarely people have intersex conditions, but they're still either female or male. People should have full freedom to live and dress however and love whomever they wish, regardless of their sex. Gender is just about personality at best, but at its worst it's about deliberate sexist stereotypes that form a "hierarchical structure that maintains male domination over female people." She explained why this clear analysis is critically important to women: "female human people as a class share oppression on the basis of our biological material reality." It's important to lesbians in particular because, "when we introduce 'gender' into sexuality we will have male people with penises claiming to be lesbians because they 'identify as women,' and that is an affront to my sexuality as a female homosexual.... It's a form of conversion therapy to pressure lesbians into having sexual relationships with male-bodied people." Julia pointed out that naming the political theory by which she "analyzes systems of oppression 'transphobic' or 'trans-exclusionary' is kind of silly, because trans men are female; they are too susceptible to forced impregnation" and other forms of oppression because of their sex.

Committee members and trans activists who spoke against Julia were decidedly less clear in their attempts to explain their positions; in fact they were downright muddled and confused. The men in the room were aloof to women's concerns, while the comments of trans-identified females were brimming with internalized misogyny.

Two gay men who are members of the committee, Phillip Clark and Robert Steininger, weighed in to make extraordinary claims about the meaning and significance of sex. Phillip stated that his main concern with Julia's statement was that her "definition of sex is not one that... a majority of mainstream science or psychology has endorsed in today's age," but offered no further explanation of how science or psychology supposedly disagrees with the standard dictionary-definition of sex meaning male or female. He claimed that Julia's views are contrary to the "human dignity" of trans-identified people. Robert made similar remarks, saying that Julia's statements reminded him of the view that gay men are not "real" men. He asserted that "Julia's want to break the patriarchy... is stuck in the binary," that her definition of sex as a material reality is merely a part of Julia's "idiolect" (personal language), and that her language "discounted individuals' own stories."

Somehow, both of these men failed to see that sexist stereotypes used against both gay men and lesbian women are the very same stereotypes that fuel "gender identity."

### **Woman-hatred among trans activists**

One trans activist in attendance described her experience of being called a woman as "very traumatizing." Another female who identifies as a trans man described past sexual trauma, deep

discomfort in the female body, and self-harm in response to those difficulties, without making the connection between female trauma and transgender identity.

A committee member, Ezra Halstead, self-described “trans man who is sure as hell not a woman,” stated that it was important to share the following:

“I had my uterus and ovaries removed recently so I’m currently having hot flashes when I get stressed. This is rhetorical, it’s not an actual question: Does that make me a woman because I had a uterus? No it doesn’t, and I’m not a woman, and I never have been one, and I think it’s appalling and absurd.... My uterus... doesn’t make me any less of a man, it doesn’t make me any less of a man that I have a vulva; it’s there and it’s masculine, and it’s a male and it’s a man. And that’s the way it is, and that does not take anything away from anyone else’s identity....

Julia thanked Ezra for sharing those experiences, affirmed Ezra’s dignity as a human being, and expressed gratitude that Ezra had survived such an invasive and dangerous set of surgical procedures. She then explained: “I do disagree with the use of ‘cisgender’ as a descriptor of female born people who identify as women.... So please never use the word ‘cis’ in reference to me because that is not how I identify, and you would be mis-gendering me, as ‘cisgender’ is the ‘gender’ that I do not identify with.” This was not enough for Ezra or others on the committee, who argued that Julia must not only call Ezra a “trans man” as Julia had been doing, but “male.”

### **Gay men on the Commission steer the meeting toward a vote to remove Julia**

Attending the meeting were three gay males, all of whom made hostile comments about Julia’s views and her ability to serve on Baltimore’s LGBTQ Commission.

The meeting was convened and chaired by Akil Patterson, a Maryland athletic star active in LGBTQ activism for the last decade. At the outset Akil made clear that the emergency meeting was called at the direction of Jabari Lyles, another gay man and LGBTQ Affairs Liaison to Mayor Catherine Pugh. Lyles had directed that the Commission “put Julia’s commissioner position on hold,” and then “tasked” Patterson with delivering one of two results: he could either inform Lyles “that we’ve worked out our issues” – meaning that Julia would renounce her view that lesbians are female homosexuals, or at least keep that view “private” – or he could orchestrate a re-vote on Julia’s position.

Patterson at times attempted to project neutrality, at one point even seeming to acknowledge that Julia too had been required to “defend her idea of who she is as a lesbian, just as everyone in this room has had to defend who they are.” But later he clarified that she could only hold that view in private, if she hoped to retain her position on the Commission.

Akil explained that the committee vote would address the question of whether “this committee feels confident that Julia will act in a... responsible manner towards all members of the community and do that fairly and justly.” He abstained from the voting on whether to subject Julia’s position to a re-vote, but not before steering the vote aggressively toward one outcome:

My question for you was simply, could you in a responsible manner not publicly bring your internal language to a table of diversity? A diversity of thought, yes, but what you did was almost intentional when you called somebody outside of the gender that they

asked you to.... Me personally, I don't care what someone wants to identify as.... If they want me to call them an Apache attack helicopter, if that's their gender, fine, it doesn't hurt me.... When I walked in I wanted you simply to say, yes, I don't really care what you identify as, as long as during this process we can have an exchange of thought. But when you ignored those individuals... I felt harm for those [trans-identified] people in this room.

In other words, as gay men, Akil and the others on the committee felt harm on behalf of a trans-identified people when others disagree with their self-definition. But they were blind to the harm that lesbians and all women face when forced to let others redefine our own sex and sexual orientation out of existence. According to these men, Julia as a lesbian must respect others' self-definitions and their views on sex and gender, but she is not entitled to expect the same from others on the Commission.

After his personal statement Akil instructed the other members of the committee on the procedure needed to compel a re-vote on Julia's Commission role. Ava Pipitone made the necessary motion, several other members seconded it, and all members except Julia voted in favor. This means that a confidential ballot will be circulated on the question of whether Julia can continue representing lesbians on the Commission.

### **The consequences of erasing sex and excluding lesbians from local government LGBTQ representation.**

If Julia is voted off the Commission on the basis of her belief that sex is an immutable material reality and forms the basis of women's oppression, there will be serious implications for all women in Baltimore.

Mayor Catherine Pugh established the Baltimore LGBTQ Commission in an [executive order](#)<sup>5</sup> signed January 5, 2018. Its task is to:

advise the Mayor, City Council, and City agencies about issues of concern affecting the LGBTQ community, bring the LGBTQ communities and the larger Baltimore community together through long-range projects, and ensure that City agencies fairly and equitably address issues affecting Baltimore's LGBTQ community, and afford LGBTQ individuals access to and inclusion in the services of the City of Baltimore.

As a lesbian and a woman, Julia sought to bring to the Commission a solid theory and analysis of the sex-gender hierarchy and the ways in which it harms vulnerable people in Baltimore. If she is voted off the Commission, at a minimum there will be no lesbian representation on the Commission's Law and Policy Committee, and the vote will further establish that no lesbian on the Commission can publicly state that lesbians are exclusively defined as female homosexuals.

The three women attending the meeting in support of Julia explained why the implications of this move are deeply disturbing and harmful for women. One woman expressed shock that lesbians who express good-faith theoretical disagreements with "gender identity" are unwelcome on the Commission. One woman expressed sorrow that the committee would not be able to work toward policies that protect the safety and dignity of *every* member of the LGBTQ umbrella, including lesbians. One woman strongly condemned the other committee members and trans activists in attendance for supporting a policy that endangers vulnerable females – women and girls who are rape survivors, incarcerated, victims of male

domestic violence, or otherwise in need of transitional shelter – by depriving us of any public space where we can find refuge away from male people.

The prison safety issue that sparked the controversy over Julia’s position is just one example of the how the erasure of sex is holding the City of Baltimore back from protecting women *and* trans-identified people. Black males who identify as transwomen often sell sex on “the Stroll” in Baltimore, leaving them vulnerable to all sorts of exploitation and violence at the hands of pimps and johns who are almost entirely male. Prostitution is an [extremely dangerous](#)<sup>6</sup> activity: The “workplace homicide rate for prostitutes (204 per 100,000) is many times higher than that for women and men in the standard occupations that had the highest workplace homicide rates in the United States during the 1980s (4 per 100,000 for female liquor store workers and 29 per 100,000 for male taxicab drivers).” But who is to blame for the murders of transwomen working on the Stroll in Baltimore? According to Ava Pipitone and other trans activists who attended the meeting, it is not men or male violence, but some vague category called “[cis people](#).”<sup>7</sup> This illustrates how eliminating a sex-based analysis of this problem obscures the culpability of violent males, making it easier for pimps and sex-buyers to stay hidden from public scrutiny.

Erasing sex from public policy and replacing it with subjective self-declared “gender identity” also undermines the fundamental legal groundwork for recognizing and combatting sex-based oppression and sex discrimination against women and girls. Many local governments around the country are beginning to move away from policies that criminalize breast feeding in public, based on the understanding that it’s a form of sex-based discrimination against women. But “gender identity” theory undermines the claim that such policies amount to sex discrimination, because it holds that both women and men (*i.e.* trans men) can breastfeed, making anti-breastfeeding policies appear to be sex-neutral. Transitional shelters provide another example. Baltimore has shelters and other homeless and addiction support services that serve men and families, but very few designed to serve [women only](#).<sup>8</sup> Those few resources are critical for women whose experience of male violence leaves them terrified to be in close quarters with men. But women’s services could now be forced to admit any man who claims to identify as a woman, depriving women of their precious places of refuge. The Karen White case discussed above is only one of several examples where women have been [harmed](#)<sup>9</sup> by such policies.

The list of examples continues. Leadership programs, scholarships, and electoral short-lists designed to remedy a long history of discrimination against women and girls could now be used by males who self-identify as women. Males may be listed in official records as women, skewing critical data that women need to understand sex-based criminal offense patterns, women’s health issues, and educational disparities that leave girls behind. The Law and Policy committee’s troubling denial of the reality of sex indicates that the Baltimore LGBTQ Commission will support these skewed policies while prohibiting public discussion about the effects on lesbian and bisexual females.

## **Conclusion**

Toward the end of the lengthy and tense meeting convened to discuss her role on the Commission, Julia Beck stated with clarity what had become patently obvious in the foregoing discussion:

I think everyone’s heart is set. I think what we’re doing here is postulating. I’m trying my best, people, but we all understand words to mean different things, and that’s not really conducive to the purpose of our committee, which is to advise the Mayor and other city

agencies on laws and policies. If we don't agree on the meanings of words, we cannot do the work.... I could bring out a dictionary and prove to you that a lesbian is a female homosexual, or a woman is a female human, but if your beliefs disallow you from seeing the dictionary definition as a legitimate definition... then why would we have a diversity of thought... if there's only one thought acceptable?

I could talk about this all day, and I would love to, because it affects my life. When we cannot define woman, women's liberation is moot. When women cannot define themselves as female adult humans, there is no way for us to organize as female adult humans. If lesbians cannot define themselves as female homosexuals, if male people can call themselves lesbians, then the women's movement and lesbian liberation is destroyed, it's obliterated.

As the Commission was established it seeks to include a diversity of people and experiences and ideas, and that's why I'm here. I'm here to represent lesbians. [But] when lesbians are forced to include male people with penises, it destroys lesbianism, and we might as well call it a "GTBQ Commission."

A copy of Julia's written statement to the Law and Policy Committee is reproduced below.

For now, it seems that a group led by a former "fullback on the [football team](#),"<sup>10</sup> working closely with a former university football [right guard](#),<sup>11</sup> may succeed in blocking lesbians from the Baltimore "LGBTQ" playing field.

By Jennifer Chavez, Women's Liberation Front board  
Published online at [womensliberationfront.org](http://womensliberationfront.org), Dec. 9, 2018

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.star-telegram.com/news/local/community/fort-worth/article134353039.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-leeds-45436953>

<sup>3</sup> <https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2018/10/the-cautionary-tale-of-karen-white-the-transgender-rapist/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bk3uh90IA9d/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://mayor.baltimorecity.gov/news/executive-order/2018-11-15-executive-order-2018-01-baltimore-lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender>

<sup>6</sup> <https://academic.oup.com/aje/article/159/8/778/91471>

<sup>7</sup> <https://youtu.be/V3kJIVbun0c?t=150>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.shelterlistings.org/city/baltimore-md.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://globalnews.ca/news/3300518/concerns-over-transgender-client-at-okanagan-shelter/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/BOQFnDDg9gd/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://umterps.com/news/2013/4/9/208127280.aspx>