

IN SUPPORT OF SB-606

To: Judiciary Committee (House) and Judicial Proceedings Committee (Senate)
From: Jonathon R. Church, Chief of Homicide, Prince George's County State's Attorney's Office
Date: February 7, 2020
Re: Written Testimony in support of House Bill 917 and Senate Bill 606

I am submitting this written testimony to offer my support for House Bill 917 and Senate Bill 606.

I am a retired police officer from Anne Arundel County and have been a prosecutor in Anne Arundel County and Prince George's County for the past 14 years. I am currently the Chief of the Homicide Unit in Prince George's County State's Attorney's Office. During my time as an officer and as a prosecutor I have been involved in the investigation and prosecution of every type of crime including violent crimes, robberies, sex offenses, child abuse, assaults, and homicides to name a few. In my career in law enforcement I and my colleagues spend a great deal of time trying to determine the motive behind the crimes we investigate and prosecute. And, frankly, juries demand information on the motives behind crimes. I am most appalled, and I believe the whole of society is as well, with crimes that are committed in whole or in part because of the victim's status; whether they be black, white, Hispanic, homeless, transgender, homosexual, whatever differences others pick up on and use as a means of justifying their actions.

This recognition is reflected in the current Hate Crimes statute which makes it a separate crime to commit a crime upon another because of their status. There is one problem, however; some interpret the statute to mean that the victim's status must be the "only" motivation behind the crime. I do not believe that was the intent of the legislature when it enacted the statute. However, there is now a need to clearly state that if the status of the victim was the reason behind the crime, whether it is the only reason or one of many reasons, that we will not tolerate that hate manifesting into criminal behavior that victimizes others because of their differences. Just like pregnancy, you cannot be a "little

racist” or a little of anything that drives you to dehumanize others and consider them to be less than yourself and *your* race, gender, ethnicity, etc. You either are, or you are not. And acting on that hate, whether it is the sole reason or a part of the reasons, is offensive to society and humanity.

This bill would give the clarity that is needed so that those seeking justice and a better society have the tools necessary to ensure that justice is done, people are protected and free to express who they are without fear of attack, and we work toward becoming a better society. I respectfully request a favorable report on HB917/SB-606.

Jonathon R. Church