



Maryland General Assembly
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
February 22, 2023

Testimony of Meredith R. Weisel
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ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) is pleased to submit this testimony in **support of SB840, *Public Safety - Protecting Against Hate Crimes Grant Fund - Establishment***, a bill that would formally establish a special, non-lapsing fund to make grants available to nonprofit organizations, including faith-based organizations, to provide security enhancements to protect against hate crimes.

Since 1913, the mission of ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) has been to “stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” For decades, one of the most important ways in which ADL has fought against bigotry and antisemitism has been by investigating extremist threats across the ideological spectrum, including from white supremacists and other far-right violent extremists, producing research to inform the public, and working with law enforcement, educators, the tech industry, and elected leaders to promote best practices to effectively address and counter these threats.

Related to this work, ADL has long been recognized as a leading resource on effective responses to violent bigotry, including hate crimes. In 1981, ADL crafted the first model hate crime law in the country, and today, 46 states, as well as the District of Columbia, have hate crime laws, many of which are based on or substantially similar to our model, which was unanimously upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court. We were also privileged to lead a broad coalition of civil rights, religious, educational, professional, law enforcement, and civic organizations for more than a decade in support of the 2009 Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act (HCPA).

In recent years, houses of worship across the country have unfortunately become increasingly vulnerable to hate-fueled violence and threats. Incidents have included the single deadliest anti-Jewish attack in U.S. history at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh in 2018, the murder of nine Black members of Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston in 2015, and the murder of six members of the Sikh Temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin in 2012. Although not a deadly attack, the recent hostage situation at the synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, serves as another stark reminder of the threats faith communities face.

Against this backdrop, many nonprofit organizations, including houses of worship and other faith-based organizations, are increasingly struggling to afford necessary security precautions, which generally fall into three categories: training, hardening of facilities, and security staffing. While many training resources are often available free of charge, there are very real costs associated with the other two prongs of protecting houses of worship. From the installation of security cameras and alarm systems, to bollards intended to protect congregants gathering at an entrance or exit, to shatter resistant film on windows, to adequate fire mitigation or cyber-

security measures, there are a wide range of needs that each faith institution must consider in addressing its security needs, based on the communities each institution serves. Indeed, in addition to serving as places of prayer, many of our religious institutions house schools, day care centers and nonprofit organizations.

Senate Bill 840 will formalize the availability of critical resources to assist institutions in funding their security improvements. The bill recognizes the unique vulnerabilities shared by all nonprofit institutions, including faith-based organizations, and it recognizes that enhancing the safety and security of faith institutions and nonprofit organizations is an important public safety priority.

We accordingly urge the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee to give SB840 a favorable report.