



Testimony in SUPPORT of *House Bill 1386 - Education – School Employee Antibias Training - Requirements*
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
March 27, 2024

The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (JCRC) serves as the public affairs and community relations arm of the Jewish community. We represent over 100 Jewish social service agencies, synagogues, and schools throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, equity, and pluralism. We work throughout the region to advocate for our agencies that serve the most vulnerable residents and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the Jewish community and all Marylanders.

The JCRC supports House Bill 1386 which requires the State Department of Education to develop guidelines for an antibias training program for school employees and requires county boards of education and certain nonpublic schools to offer training based on the guidelines. The purpose of these guidelines is to reduce implicit bias, raise awareness of discrimination that historically marginalized racial and ethnic minorities face, and combat prejudices that historically marginalized religious minorities face, including antisemitism and islamophobia.

The JCRC understands first-hand the critical need for school employee antibias training and the positive impact such training can have on students. Our agency runs a robust education outreach and programming department. Its mission is to combat school-based antisemitism; advocate on behalf of Jewish students, families, and employees; and promote safe, hate-free, respectful learning environments for all students. In Montgomery County, the JCRC is also deeply engaged in addressing all forms of academic inequity. We have strongly supported MCPS' anti-racist audit, we are a proud member of the Black and Brown Coalition for Educational Equity and Excellence, and we also work closely with Identity to support MCPS' Latino youth.

Dramatic spikes in antisemitism over the last several years have been well-documented and show no signs of abating. Indeed, this trend has only intensified since Hamas' October 7th attack on Israel and the ongoing war, resulting in an unprecedented and disturbing 361% increase in antisemitic incidents compared to the same period a year ago. A significant portion of those incidents, from vandalism to bullying to discrimination, have occurred in K-12 educational settings. Even before October 7th, FBI data revealed that 10% of all reported hate crimes occurred on school or college campuses, and that 30% of all juvenile victims of hate crimes were targeted at their schools. According to the ADL, school abased antisemitism in 2022 increased about 50% from the previous year. This includes vandalism and harassment.

History has shown that bias, intolerance, and prejudice, can lead to violence, dehumanization, and in the case of the Jewish people, extermination of six million. Education and training are critical to helping stem this trajectory of hatred. We need these guidelines to create greater accountability and signal to the community that inclusivity, cultural awareness and combatting all forms of hatred, including antisemitism, are a priority.

School personnel often have limited familiarity with antisemitism and little cultural competency about Jewish ethnicity, Jewish practice, and the critical importance of Israel to the Jewish identities of an overwhelming majority of American Jews. To address this gap, the JCRC has developed an ever-expanding roster of teacher training opportunities for educators. Most critically, we have partnered with the ADL's DC regional office to develop a comprehensive 3-hour training on antisemitism, anti-Zionism, and Jewish identity that has been presented to over 1,400 MCPS personnel. The JCRC strongly believes that school employees should have a baseline competency in the forms of hatred that are significantly manifesting in our schools at this time, both those that are religiously based - antisemitism and Islamophobia - and otherwise. That includes xenophobia, anti-Asian hatred, homophobia, transphobia, and racism. This knowledge can help schools respond swiftly and effectively to hate and bias incidents when they occur.

Our agency also believes that the prevention of antisemitism and Islamophobia must be part of antibias training at institutions for school employees. If these hatreds are not included, it is impossible to disrupt what feels like an endlessly repeating cycle of antisemitic and Islamophobic incidents. Educational leaders must be equipped to address these difficult issues. House Bill 1386 is an expression of our community's commitment to responding forcefully, consistently, and sensitively to a problem that has only continued to worsen over recent months and years, and which undermines the very fabric of our society. It is also a commitment to ensuring that our schools reflect the very best values that we wish to instill in future generations of leaders. For these reasons we urge a favorable report for House Bill 1386.