



February 13, 2024

Honorable Chair Luke Clippinger  
House Judiciary Committee  
House Office Building, Room 121  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: Testimony in SUPPORT (With Amendment) of HB0547 Crime of Violence - Educational Facilities, Medical Facilities, and Places of Worship - Penalty (Sacred Places Safety Act)**

Dear Chair Clippinger and House Judiciary Committee Members:

On behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, I thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 547 Crime of Violence - Educational Facilities, Medical Facilities, and Places of Worship - Penalty (Sacred Places Safety Act) with amendment. CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization.

Between October 9 – December 2, 2023, my office recorded 223 complaints, hate bias incidents and requests for assistance.<sup>1</sup> As compared to September 2023, the months of October and November saw a four to five-fold increase in the number of reports of incidents and requests for assistance. Of the 109 complaints and requests processed between November 9 – December 2, approximately 32 percent were complaints or reports of hate bias incidents and Islamophobia in schools and colleges/universities, 13 percent were workplace related incidents and concerns, and 17 percent were reports of doxxing or online threats. We also received reports of 5 mosques that were targeted in hate bias incidents, including a bomb threat that was called in to the Idara-E-Jaferia in Silver Spring; a hate demonstration outside of the Islamic Society of Frederick; hate mail delivered to the Maryum Islamic Center in Howard County and a threatening call received at a Baltimore area mosque.

Anti-semitic incidents have also been on the rise. In December, our office condemned a menorah that was discovered toppled outside of a synagogue in Olney.<sup>2</sup> We also extended support to one of four churches in Anne Arundel County that were vandalized in Summer 2023.<sup>3</sup>

My organization supports classifying crimes of violence at educational institutions, houses of worship and hospitals as felonies, with the condition that the crime is found to be motivated by hate bias, in order to a) deter these types of offenses, 2) decrease the frequency of these crimes, 3) promote safety and protect vulnerable or marginalized communities, and 4) to promote swifter investigation and allocation of resources to impacted facilities.

By treating hate motivated crimes in these instances as felonies, law enforcement agencies may allocate more resources to investigate and prosecute these offenses. This can lead to more thorough investigations, quicker apprehension of suspects, and ultimately contributing to safer communities.

A felony classification sends a powerful message that our state values tolerance and rejects acts of bigotry and hate. It reaffirms the fundamental principles of pluralism and underscores the importance of protecting diversity in our state.

I respectfully urge you to give a favorable report with amendments for House Bill 724.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

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1. [https://www.cair.com/press\\_releases/cair-releases-updated-number-of-complaints-bias-incidents-reported-against-maryland-muslims-arabs-in-past-8-weeks/](https://www.cair.com/press_releases/cair-releases-updated-number-of-complaints-bias-incidents-reported-against-maryland-muslims-arabs-in-past-8-weeks/)
2. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2023/12/08/montgomery-county-synagogue-vandalism/>
3. <https://www.cbsnews.com/baltimore/news/vandalized-maryland-church-gathers-to-continue-christmas-tradition-of-giving/>