

**OFFICERS**

ELIZABETH GREEN  
 President  
 ROBIN WEIMAN  
 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President  
 AMALIA HONICK  
 BENJAMIN ROSENBERG  
 RABBI STEVEN SCHWARTZ  
 RABBI JONATHAN SEIDEMANN  
 MELANIE SHAPIRO  
 RABBI ANDREW BUSCH  
 Past President  
 HOWARD LIBIT  
 Executive Director

**MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS**

Adat Chaim Congregation  
 American Jewish Committee  
 Americans for Peace Now  
 Baltimore Chapter  
 American Israel Public Affairs Committee  
 American Red Magen David for Israel  
 American Zionist Movement  
 Amit Women  
 Association of Reform Zionists of America  
 Baltimore Board of Rabbis  
 Baltimore Hebrew Congregation  
 Baltimore Jewish Green and Just Alliance  
 Baltimore Men's ORT  
 Baltimore Zionist District  
 Beth Am Congregation  
 Beth El Congregation  
 Beth Israel Congregation  
 Beth Shalom Congregation of  
 Howard County  
 Beth Tfiloh Congregation  
 B'nai B'rith, Chesapeake Bay Region  
 B'nai Israel Congregation  
 B'nai Jacob Shaarei Zion Congregation  
 Bolton Street Synagogue  
 Chevra Ahavas Chesed, Inc.  
 Chevrei Tzedek Congregation  
 Chizuk Amuno Congregation  
 Congregation Beit Tikvah  
 Congregation Tiferes Yisroel  
 Federation of Jewish Women's  
 Organizations of Maryland  
 Hadassah  
 Har Sinai - Oheb Shalom Congregation  
 J Street  
 Jewish Federation of Howard County  
 Jewish Labor Committee  
 Jewish War Veterans  
 Jewish War Veterans, Ladies Auxiliary  
 Jewish Women International  
 Jews For Judaism  
 Moses Montefiore Anshe Emunah  
 Hebrew Congregation  
 National Council of Jewish Women  
 Ner Tamid Congregation  
 Rabbinical Council of America  
 Religious Zionists of America  
 Shaarei Tfiloh Congregation  
 Shomrei Emunah Congregation  
 Suburban Orthodox Congregation  
 Temple Beth Shalom  
 Temple Isaiah  
 Zionist Organization of America  
 Baltimore District

**House Bill 547 - Crime of Violence - Educational Facilities, Medical Facilities,  
 and Places of Worship - Penalty (Sacred Places Safety Act)  
 Judiciary Committee – February 13, 2024  
 Favorable With Amendments**

**Background:** House Bill 547 would create a felony for a person committing a crime of violence while the person is in an educational facility, a medical facility, or a place of worship as defined by this bill, in addition to any other penalty imposed for the underlying crime.

**Written Comments:** The Baltimore Jewish Council represents The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore and all of its agencies and the organized Jewish community in Greater Baltimore, including places of worship.

While we appreciate the sponsor's intention with this bill and believe that those who commit crimes of violence in sacred spaces should be held accountable, we would like to bring to the attention of the committee that the definition of "Places of Worship" is not inclusive of our all our community places of worship. To be specific, the bill as drafted defines "Places of Worship" as follows:

**"PLACE OF WORSHIP" MEANS A NONRESIDENTIAL LOCATION WHERE MORE THAN ONE INDIVIDUAL ASSEMBLES FOR PURPOSES OF RELIGIOUS OR SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCE.**

Several small congregations are places of worship within the home of the Rabbi and their family, with the living room being used as the "synagogue" for the community. These can be found across the country. Many of these are Chabad Houses and are located around college campuses to help students feel connected to their Judaism while away from home. These locations are representative of "seeking Judaism wherever you are." For example, [The Rohr Chabad Jewish Center at Towson and Goucher](#) is available for students at both colleges in the home of Rabbi Mendy Rivkin and his wife, Sheiny. There are currently over [40 Chabad Houses across the State of Maryland](#).

To ensure that "Places of Worship" is comprehensive, we ask that the definition be amended so that congregations such as Chabad Houses would be included under the bill. This could be through striking the word "nonresidential," however the Committee may see fit another way to better address this exclusionary language. **For these reasons, the Baltimore Jewish Councils asks for these amendments to be considered on HB547.**

*The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of The Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.*