



Maryland General Assembly
House Judiciary Committee
February 20, 2024

Testimony of Meredith R. Weisel
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ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) is pleased to submit this testimony in **support of HB748, Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention – Code of Conduct**, which would require the Attorney General to adopt and make publicly available a code of conduct for members of the commission as well as creating a process for investigating violations and procedures for suspension of members.

ADL (the Anti-Defamation League)

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 and by working with law enforcement, educators, the tech industry, and elected leaders to promote best practices to effectively address and counter these threats. Further, ADL conducts an annual *Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents*, which is widely used by law enforcement, elected officials, and the community at-large to not only understand how to respond to antisemitic incidents, but how to create change.

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).

Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention

During the 2023 Maryland General Assembly session, ADL fully supported **HB1066, Hate Crimes – Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention – Establishment**, which established a commission to develop strategies to prevent and respond to hate crime activity and evaluate state laws and policies relating to hate crimes. As an organization that had been involved in the Attorney General working group on hate crimes and bias incidents from its inception, we felt it was urgent to formalize the creation of a full commission to carry out this work.

It’s important to remember that behind every hate crime statistic, there is a person, a family, a community – dealing with the unimaginable. Hate crimes cause a distinct type of harm that can have a lasting, immeasurable impact. This is because hate crimes target people due to their

protected, immutable characteristics – race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, sex, gender, gender identity, disability – things about a person that are central to identity and cannot be changed.

ADL is proud to be a leading anti-hate organization that has been able to help thousands of people who report hate and bias incidents to us. We are honored to be a part of this Commission entrusted with developing policy solutions to better support communities disproportionately impacted by hate-fueled violence.

House Bill 748

Establishing codes of conduct for various commissions can help set out clear guidelines for how commissioners should behave and act while performing their duties. A code of conduct can help build a strong and cohesive values-based culture that reassures the community of the important work the commission was set up to do. In the case of the Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention, a code of conduct which lays out procedures for investigating and possibly suspending a commissioner found in violation, will give the Attorney General more clear-cut guidelines that are not currently in place. This will also reassure current members of the commission what is expected of them and provide more direction in setting a positive tone for the work in fighting hate in our community. Ultimately, a code of conduct can provide a space that safeguards inclusion, respect and integrity.

We urge the Committee to release HB748 with a favorable report.