

Committee: Judiciary

Testimony: HB0750 – Criminal Law – Interference with Access to or Egress from a Religious Facility – Prohibition

Organization: Jewish Community Relations Council of Howard County, MD

Submitting: Laura Salganik, Chair

Position: FAVORABLE

Hearing Date: February 17, 2026

Dear Chair Bartlett, Vice-Chair Davis, and Members of the Committee:

The Jewish Community Relations Council is submitting this testimony in favor of HB070. We favor a prohibition on interfering with access to or egress from a religious facility.

The most recent hate crimes data from the FBI paints a disturbing picture of widespread anti-Jewish hate in America. Jews, who account for just 2% of the population in the United States, were the second-most targeted group, with 18% of all reported hate crimes committed against the Jewish community in 2024. This amounts to a 5.8% increase from 2023. A far more disturbing figure is that among all religiously motivated hate crimes, the data showed 69% targeted Jews. Almost half (45%) of these crimes take place at or within a synagogue or at a religious school within or adjacent to a synagogue, and such attacks against synagogues have increased 71.4% since October 7, 2023.

The most recent of such incidents took place Thursday, January 8, 2026, outside Kew Gardens Young Israel Congregation in Queens, NY, a demonstration that forced the early closure of a daycare, two elementary schools and a religious site. November 19, 2025, outside Manhattan's Park Avenue Synagogue, some 200 protesters blocked access to the synagogue, intimidating congregants and guests entering and leaving the building, shouting antisemitic slurs.

Such incidents are not confined to Jews, on November 28, 2025, a man threatened a group of women with violence outside the Dar Al Nur Community Center in Fairfax County, VA, and on the morning of August 27, 2025, a mass shooting occurred at the Church of the Annunciation and its religious school in Minneapolis, MN. Following the recent attack on Beth Israel Congregation in Jackson, MS, failing to provide such protection may result in escalation of such interference.

Maryland must act to protect all its citizens, of every faith, and specifically their safe access to and egress from their houses of worship. Such protection will allow all who call Maryland home to

feel safe entering and leaving a house of worship, and it may reduce the potential for physical harm and intimidation against those who choose to freely practice their religion through communal worship.