

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2020 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader

Senate Bill 161

(Senator Elfreth, *et al.*)

Judicial Proceedings

Judiciary

Crimes - Hate Crimes - Use of an Item or a Symbol to Threaten or Intimidate

This bill prohibits a person from placing or inscribing an item or a symbol, including an actual or depicted noose or swastika, whether temporary or permanent, on any real or person property, public or private, without the express permission of the owner or specific persons, with the intent to threaten or intimate any person or group of persons. Violators are guilty of a misdemeanor, punishable by imprisonment for up to three years and/or a \$5,000 fine.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Potential minimal increase in general fund revenues and expenditures due to the bill's penalty provisions if the bill results in additional prosecutions.

Local Effect: Potential minimal increase in local revenues and expenditures due to the bill's penalty provisions if the bill results in additional prosecutions.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: The State's hate crimes statutes are contained in Title 10, Subtitle 3 of the Criminal Law Article, specifically §§ 10-302 (damaging property of a religious entity), 10-303 (obstructing exercise of religious beliefs), 10-304 (harassment or destruction of property), and 10-305 (damage to an associated building).

Section 10-302 (Damaging Property of a Religious Entity)

A person may not deface, damage, or destroy, or attempt or threaten to deface, damage, or destroy, personal or real property that is owned, leased, or used by a religious entity or for any religious purpose.

Section 10-303 (Obstructing Exercise of Religious Beliefs)

A person may not, by force or threat of force, obstruct or attempt to obstruct another in the free exercise of that person's religious beliefs.

Section 10-304 (Harassment or Destruction of Property)

A person may not engage in the following acts because another person or group is homeless or because of another person's or group's race, color, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender, disability, or national origin:

- commit a crime or attempt or threaten to commit a crime against another person or group;
- deface, damage, or destroy, or attempt or threaten to deface, damage, or destroy the real or personal property of another person or group;
- burn or attempt or threaten to burn an object on the real or personal property of another person or group; or
- commit any of these acts when the act involves a separate crime that is a felony or that results in the death of a victim.

Section 10-305 (Damage to an Associated Building)

A person may not deface, damage, or destroy; attempt or threaten to deface, damage, or destroy; burn or attempt or threaten to burn an object on; or damage the real or personal property connected to a building that is publicly or privately owned, leased, or used (1) because a person or group of a particular race, color, religious belief, sexual orientation, gender, or national origin, or because a person or group that is homeless, has contacts or is associated with the building or (2) if there is evidence that exhibits animosity against a person or group due to the race, color, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender, disability, or national origin of that group or because that person or group is homeless.

Penalties

In general, an individual who violates these provisions is guilty of a misdemeanor, punishable by imprisonment for up to 3 years and/or a maximum fine of \$5,000. However,

if a violation of § 10-304 involves a separate felony, the violator is guilty of a felony and is subject to imprisonment for up to 10 years and/or a fine of up to \$10,000. If a violation of § 10-304 results in the death of the victim, the violator is subject to imprisonment for up to 20 years and/or a fine of up to \$20,000.

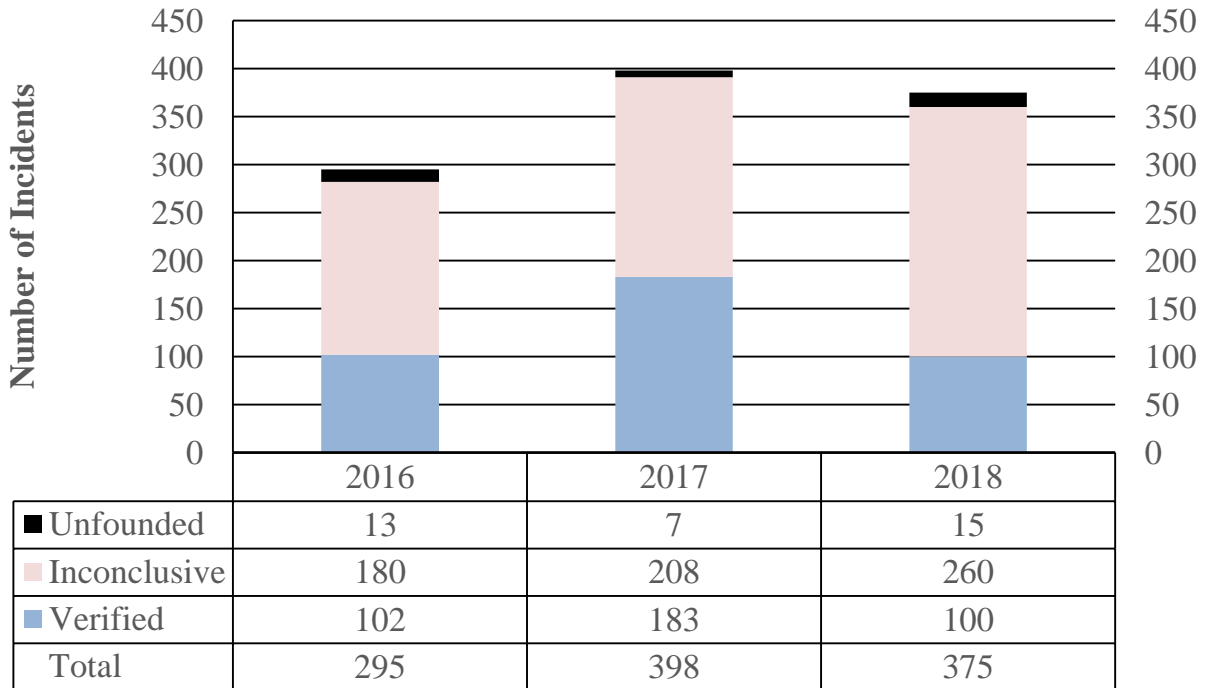
First Amendment Rights

Nothing in the hate crimes statutes may be construed to infringe on the speech of a religious leader or other individual during peaceable activity intended to express the leader's or individual's religious beliefs or convictions.

Background: According to a fall 2019 publication by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), law enforcement agencies reported 7,120 bias-motivated criminal incidents nationwide, an approximate 1% decrease compared to the 7,175 incidents reported in 2018. The FBI received information on 49 criminal incidents from 20 participating agencies (cities, counties, colleges, police departments, *etc.*) in Maryland. The remaining 135 participating agencies indicated no incidents of hate crime for the quarters for which they submitted reports during 2018.

In September 2019, the Department of State Police (DSP) published the *State of Maryland 2018 Hate/Bias Report*. According to the report, 375 hate/bias incidents were reported by law enforcement agencies in the State to DSP during calendar 2018, representing a 6% decrease from the 398 incidents reported in calendar 2017. Of the 375 incidents reported in 2018, 100 were verified to be motivated by bias, 260 were inconclusive regarding motivation, and 15 were determined to be unfounded. The data in DSP's report includes incidents that may or may not be considered criminal activity; the FBI data is limited to hate/bias-based crimes. **Exhibit 1** contains DSP hate/bias incident data for 2016 through 2018.

Exhibit 1
Hate/Bias Incidents Reported by Law Enforcement Agencies to DSP
2016-2018



DSP: Department of State Police

Source: *State of Maryland 2018 Hate/Bias Report*

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: HB 4 of 2019 passed the House with amendments and received a hearing in the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, but no further action was taken. HB 1695 of 2018, a similar bill, passed the House with amendments and passed the Senate with amendments, but no further action was taken. HB 1218 of 2010, another similar bill, passed the House and passed second reading in the Senate with amendments. The bill was special ordered in the Senate, and no further action was taken on the bill prior to the conclusion of the legislative session. Similar bills were also introduced during the 2008 and 2009 sessions.

Designated Cross File: HB 5 (Delegate Chang, *et al.*) - Judiciary.

Information Source(s): Maryland Commission on Civil Rights; Maryland State Commission on Criminal Sentencing Policy; Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Office of the Public Defender; Maryland State's Attorneys' Association; Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services; Department of State Police; Federal Bureau of Investigation; Department of Legislative Services

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