



Testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 5 – “Crimes – Hate Crimes – Use of a Noose or Swastika to Threaten or Intimidate”
House Judiciary Committee
January 16, 2020

The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (JCRC) serves as the public affairs and community relations arm of the Jewish community. We represent over 100 Jewish organizations and synagogues throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, and pluralism. We work tirelessly throughout the entire Greater Washington area to advocate for our agencies that serve the most vulnerable residents, support our Jewish day schools and community centers, and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the entire Jewish community.

Over the past few years, we have continued to see an increase in hate crimes, hate incidents, and even threats motivated by hate. Maryland has not been immune to this and we’ve had public and private schools, synagogues, churches, mosques and other local institutions tagged with swastikas and hate filled messages both outside and inside the buildings. In 2019, unfortunately, we saw another huge uptick of hate incidents and threats, including bomb threats, hate graffiti, nooses, and more targeted toward both individual members and groups of certain religions, gender, races, ethnicities, sexual orientation, and more. HB 5 would help to strengthen our current criminal statutes by punishing individuals who make these heinous threats against someone because they are a certain race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. Even though no physical harm may result from a hate threat, it can still cause severe emotional and psychological harm.

According to the Anti-Defamation League, criminal activity motivated by bias is different from other criminal conduct. These crimes occur because of the perpetrator's bias or hatred against the victim on the basis of their actual or perceived status. Specifically, the victim's race, religion, national origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability is the reason for the crime. If that bias did not exist, likely no crime would occur at all. The JCRC is in constant contact with our local law enforcement and doing what we can to help support community members. We provide them with information on how to report these hate crimes, incidents, and threats. We also understand that these threats are very personal crimes, which leave the victims with emotional and psychological impacts. Hate threats may not physically wound and but they may intimidate other members of the

victim's community, leaving them feeling terrorized, isolated, vulnerable, and unprotected by the law.

For these reasons, we ask this committee to give a favorable report on HB 5.