

Submitted to the House Judiciary Committee

Testimony Concerning HB 005

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

January 16, 2020

Position: Support

Members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Roberto Veloso. I am an attorney in Annapolis, Maryland and am also the current Chair of the Anne Arundel County Human Relations Commission. I come before you today to urge you to enact HB 5, not only to strengthen the State of Maryland’s hate crimes law, but also to proclaim the State’s commitment to eradicating hate in our communities.

My efforts to join the coalition of police, prosecutors, local government and community groups committed to overcoming hate began in earnest in 2003 when my neighborhood in Annapolis, the same neighborhood where the late great House Speaker Mike Busch lived, was leafletted by a white supremacist group. The flier, which I received along with all of my neighbors, read in bold letters across the top: “MISSING.” It then contained a photograph of a young white girl with the caption: “A Future for White Children.” This vile piece of propaganda led me to become engaged in the community to fight this kind of hatred.

Ultimately, I found myself serving on the City of Annapolis Human Relations Commission as the City wrestled with the best way to counteract the impact of racist groups and individuals. Since then, I have had the opportunity to serve on other local and national level groups grappling with diversity issues and other challenges created by our country’s unfortunate legacy of racism.

Along the way, I learned many things, but central to my testimony today in support of HB 5 is the fact that hate crimes are only a symptom of the disease of racism. However, they are a symptom that must be aggressively treated if we are going to win the battle for the hearts and minds of our communities. Enacting HB 5 will serve to aggressively treat the symptom of hate crimes by making it easier for law enforcement to charge and prosecutors to convict individuals who use symbols of hate to threaten and intimidate.

Hate crimes pose a far greater danger to our communities than most people realize. When a hate incident is perpetrated, regardless of whether it meets the legal definition of a hate crime, the victim of the hate suffers injury, sometimes physical, sometimes psychic. The community also suffers collective harm. By sowing the seeds of social discord, perpetrators of hate incidents heighten the levels of distrust and animosity among different groups in our communities. As a result, we tend to forget that we have far more things in common than differences.

Enacting HB5 will encourage members of our marginalized and oppressed communities, who are frequently the victims of hate incidents, to continue to work with police and prosecutors to hold perpetrators of hate crimes accountable. It is unreasonable for our society to expect that those in our community who suffer the disproportionate burden of hate will continue to come forward to face their tormentors in court, subject their personal lives to the scrutiny of the media, suffer further trauma during cross examinations and arguments at trial, only to be told by a judge, “Sorry, despite the heinous

event you experienced because of the color of your skin, your religion, where you came from or your preference for who you love, it doesn't meet the definition of a hate crime under Maryland law."

Colbert King, the Pulitzer Prize winning columnist for the *Washington Post*, said it well when he wrote on January 3rd of this year:

"Hate thrives with silence. It shrivels from attention and activism."¹

Enacting HB 5 will help ensure that victims of hate incidents continue to courageously step forward so that law enforcement, prosecutors, local government and community groups can continue to bring the necessary attention and activism to win the hearts and minds of our communities, defeat the symptom of hate crimes and the underlying disease of racism.

For these reasons, I urge you to enact HB 005. Thank you for your time and attention.

Submitted by:

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¹ King, Colbert, I., *Hate Thrives amid silence. We must speak up.*, Washington Post, January 3, 2020
https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/hate-thrives-amid-silence-we-must-speak-up/2020/01/03/29fd0298-2db1-11ea-bcd4-24597950008f_story.html (Link last checked January 14, 2020.)