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WRITTEN TESTIMONY

House Bill 5 (HB5) – Crimes - Hate Crimes - Use of a Noose or Swastika to Threaten or Intimidate

Judiciary Committee
January 16, 2020

SUPPORT

Background: HB5 would expand current law regarding hate crimes to include prohibiting someone from placing or inscribing an item or symbol, including an actual or depicted Noose or Swastika, without the express permission of the owner of the building or property, the owner's agent, or a lawful occupant, with the intent to threaten or intimidate any person or group of persons.

Written Comments: The Baltimore Jewish Council (BJC) and Maryland's Jewish community are concerned about the recent rise in hate/bias incidents in Maryland and the damaging effect that is having on our communities. These incidents are impacting not just Jewish communities, but those of other religions and racial minorities. According to the 2018 State of Maryland Hate/Bias Report authored by the Maryland State Police, we have seen a sharp increase in hate/bias incidents over the past decade. 2018 saw the second-largest number of incidents in the last 10 years. This continuing sharp rise affected a geographically and demographically diverse array of Marylanders, with most of these incidents being targeted toward African-Americans and Jews. Incidents were reported in all 24 jurisdictions with Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Howard, Montgomery, and Prince George's counties seeing the most. These reported incidents targeted both individuals and some of our most vital arenas for community engagement, including schools, community centers, and places of worship. No place, person, place or part of our state is immune to these kinds of hateful incidents.

The 2018 report reveals that over a quarter of these hate incidents involved vandalism. Though vandalism in general is addressed in current state hate crime laws, there is a gap in addressing the placing or inscribing of an item or symbol of hate on someone's property when the action does not cause physical damage. HB5 would address this gap and make those heinous acts a hate crime when used to threaten or intimidate.

With this in mind, the Baltimore Jewish Council urges a favorable report on HB5.

The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of the Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.