



Testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 541
“Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission – Training Requirements – Hate Crimes”
House Judiciary Committee
February 11, 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, unfortunately 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 as there have been public and private schools, synagogues, churches, mosques and other local institutions tagged with swastikas and hate filled messages both outside and inside these buildings. In 2019 we saw another large uptick of hate incidents and threats, including bomb threats, hate graffiti, nooses, and more targeted towards both individual members and groups of certain religions, gender, races, ethnicities, sexual orientation, and more.

HB 541 would help to strengthen our current training requirements and expand them by making sure that each county and municipal police training school is up to date on Maryland’s hate crime laws. It will also ensure that victims of hate crimes are treated appropriately with the understanding that these crimes are directed against someone because they are a certain race, religion, gender, disability national origin, homelessness, or sexual orientation. It’s important for our officers to know that 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 believe this legislation will provide more concrete statistics to help law enforcement and the community stop these crimes from happening. Further, it will provide more synergy and better ways for victims to understand their rights and find the support they need in their respective community. For these reasons, we ask this committee to give a favorable report on HB 541.