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Testimony for the House Judiciary Committee

February 25, 2020

HB 741 Public Safety - Empowering Communities to Counter Racially Motivated Violent Extremism Program Fund - Establishment

UNFAVORABLE

The ACLU of Maryland respectfully opposes HB 741, which establishes an Empowering Communities to Counter Racially Motivated Violent Extremism Program Fund to identify warning signs of racially motivated violent extremism.

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programs have been established across the country and even here in Maryland. Typically, these programs are funded by the federal government and involve the deployment of local community members to collect information about their neighbors, other members of their faith, and even students. This tactic sows distrust and division within what may otherwise be close-knit, peaceful communities.

Even worse, the programs also improperly stigmatize communities of color, Muslim communities, and other historically marginalized people for whom typical and innocuous behavior may be perceived as threatening, alarming, or violent.

While we applaud and support efforts to address hateful violence in our communities, we respectfully urge the committee to consider other approaches besides emulating failed and biased programs, such as the CVE program.

For greater context, we have attached a 2016 letter the ACLU and partner organizations sent to President Obama in opposition to CVE programs.[1]

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[1] Coalition Letter to the White House re: Federal Support for Countering Violent Extremism Programs, *available at* https://www.aclu.org/letter/coalition-letter-white-house-re-federal-support-countering-violent-extremism-programs.