



THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

BILL: House Bill 917 / Senate Bill 606 – Criminal Law - Hate Crimes - Basis (2nd Lieutenant Richard Collins, III's Law)

SPONSOR: Delegate Wilson, *et al.*

HEARING DATE: February 11, 2020

COMMITTEE: Judiciary

CONTACT: Intergovernmental Affairs Office, 301-780-8411

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS House Bill 917 / Senate Bill 606**, which alters the law to prohibit the commission of these acts if they are *motivated either in whole or in part* by another person's or group's race, color, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender, disability, or national origin.

According to a report released by the Maryland State Police, there was a 34.9 percent increase in reported hate crimes statewide from 2016 to 2017¹. The report noted that Prince George's County along with Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Harford, Howard, and Montgomery Counties all experienced more reported hate/bias incidents than other counties around the state. More specifically, the report found that the most common types of hate/bias incidents involved race and ethnicity, which frequently resulted from anti-black or anti-African American sentiments. Consequently, African Americans represented the majority of hate/bias incident victims in Maryland (53.5 percent), revealing gross disparity among hate/bias incident victims. The study also noted an increase of religious based incidents and crimes against members of the Jewish community, as well as crimes and incidents against gay males.

While it is important to protect free speech, we must ensure that every resident is safe from the harmful threats of hate crimes. Hate crimes are motivated by the perpetrator's bias against the victim and any identifying or perceived identifying group they may belong to. Hate/bias incidents have terrorized and continue to terrorize entire communities making members of certain classes, such as racial minorities, religious groups, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people afraid to move freely in

¹State of Maryland 2017 Hate/Bias Report
<http://www.mcac.maryland.gov/resources/2017%20Maryland%20Hate%20Bias%20Report.pdf>

certain places and within in their own communities. When we look through a historic lens, it may seem we are far removed from hate crimes that tarnished the historic fabric of our country and were catalyst to the Civil Rights Movement, such as the murder of Emmett Till in 1955 and the 16th Street Baptist Church Bombing in 1963, that killed four young girls and injured 22 others. However, we are reminded that after September 11, 2011, many individuals of the Muslim faith or individuals who were perceived to be Arabs were targeted by those seeking to incite hate and violence. We are reminded of the 2015 Charleston church shooting at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church where a white-supremacist massacred nine African -American worshippers during a bible study. Here in Maryland, we are reminded of the stabbing death of 2nd Lt. Richard Collins, III, a black Bowie State University Student and lieutenant in the Army who was days from graduating from college when he was murdered, in what has been charged as a first-degree murder and a hate crime, on the University of Maryland, College Park campus. Even as recently as 2018, we think of the mass shooting at the Pittsburgh Tree of Life – Or L'Simcha Congregation, where eleven individuals were killed during Shabbat morning services. To this day, individuals and group continue to be targeted based on bias and hate. Perpetrators commit hate crimes to send a message and express anger or hatred for their victims, they often involve more violent acts than it takes to subdue or incapacitate the victim. These crimes go beyond expressing disagreement or exercising free speech.

Under **House Bill 917/ Senate Bill 606**, the State of Maryland would have the judicial power to strengthen its role in detecting and deterring future incidents of hate crime motivated by race, religion and other protected classes.

For the reasons stated above, the Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS House Bill 917/ Senate Bill 606** and asks for a **FAVORABLE** report.