

State of Maryland

Commission on Civil Rights

“Our vision is to have a State that is free from any trace of unlawful discrimination.”



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February 11, 2021

Senate Bill 400 – Hate Crimes - False Statement to a Law Enforcement Officer **POSITION: Support**

Dear Chairperson Smith, Vice Chairperson Waldstreicher, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (“MCCR”; “The Commission”) is the State agency responsible for the enforcement of laws prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, and state contracts based upon race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, physical and mental disability, and source of income.

Senate Bill 400 adds to Maryland’s hate crime statute a provision that making a false statement to a law enforcement officer motivated by, at least in part, that individual’s race, color, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender, disability, national origin, and/or homelessness is a criminal offense under said statute.

The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights supports this bill because it is well documented that we are seeing an upward surge from individuals who are apt to call police on a person or group simply because of their status as a protected class – especially due to their race, ethnicity, and ancestry. One recent example of this was in May, 2020, when Amy Cooper, a white female, called police on an African American bird watcher who asked her to leash her dog in Central Park. She was charged with filing a false police report because she stated on the call to police that he was trying to assault her, which was not true according to the video recording of the incident. Other examples have included the police being called on an African American family gathering in an Oakland, California, public park and a McKinney, Texas, pool party at a private residence. Here in Maryland, in Prince George’s County in 2019 a white male called police – on two occasions over the same weekend – to report that groups of African American women were gathered at their apartment complex’s pool enjoying beverages from glass containers in violation of the apartment complex’s policies.

Making false statements to police may already be a crime, but it is clear, especially recently, that some individuals will still do so because they are motivated by hate or bias, especially against individuals of color. Maryland’s hate crimes statute is in place to prevent these kinds of incidents while protecting people identified in the law from unnecessary harm.

For these reasons, the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights urges a favorable report on SB400. Thank you for your time and consideration of the information contained in this letter. The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights looks forward to the continued opportunity to work with you to improve and promote civil rights in Maryland.