



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony of Senator Jill P. Carter
In Favor of SB0400 - Hate Crimes – False Statement to a
Law Enforcement Officer
Before the Judicial Proceedings Committee
on February 11, 2021**

Mr. Chairman, Vice chair, and Members of the Committee:

Senate Bill 400 would expand the definition of hate crimes to include false statements made to a law enforcement officer based in whole or in material part on a person's race, color, religious belief, sexual orientation, gender, disability, national origin, or homeless status.

This bill is the result of a number of publicly reported instances of racially targeted false reports made to law enforcement against Black Americans in jurisdictions across the country. One of the most prominent examples occurred in New York City's Central Park on May 25, 2020.

On that day, Christian Cooper, a Black man, was bird watching in the park when Amy Cooper, a white woman,

walked into his vicinity with her dog unleashed, against park rules. Knowing the rule, Christian requested Amy to leash her dog. Amy reacted by approaching Christian, jutting her finger in his face, and threatening to call 911 to tell them that there is an “Afrian American man threatening my life.” Shortly thereafter, she made good on her threat, claiming to the 911 dispatch there there “is an African American man . . . in Central Park threatening myself and my dog.” At the end of the call, she pleaded with dramatic flair, “I’m sorry, I can’t hear you. I’m being threatened by a man in the [park]. Please send the cops immediately!”

Fortunately, Christian was recording the encounter on his cell phone, conclusively proving that she falsified the encounter and the 911 report. Her intent was clear though: to punish and intimidate Chrisian for requesting that she leash her dog by intentionally deploying historical, anti-Black stereotypes against him with what she thought would be a sympathetic ear: law enforcement.

Thankfully, the situation did not escalate – because of Christian’s calm demeanor, and his foresight in taking the video and leaving the scene. But we know all too well that it could have ended tragically, as we have witnessed, repeatedly, such law enforcement encounters all over the country. The prevalence of cell phone video is bringing this

problem to the public's notice in a way that was unheard of just a few years ago.

The act of filing a false police report against an individual based solely or substantially on the above characteristics, is a tool that can be used to perpetuate racist or discriminatory stereotypes, and further sow distrust between law enforcement and such marginalized communities who are targeted with such acts. It also is a waste of law enforcement resources that would be better directed when focusing on actual crimes and public safety, rather than falsified reports. Because these racially-charged falsified reports have a greater negative impact than a non-racially-charged falsified report, the punishment for such actions should be more severe by incorporating it into the state hate crime bills. The goal would be to have a deterrent effect on such racially-motivated false reports (or false reports motivated by one or more of the other protected characteristics), leading individuals to think twice about their decision before targeting individuals with false police reports.

Maryland, as a state, must be proactive instead of reactive in discouraging this type of behavior. While the Central Park example clearly did not occur in Maryland, it is just the most recent high-profile instance of such an incident occurring. We have seen such instances occur all over the United States

and it would be foolish to imagine that Maryland would be immune from such incidents.

For these reasons, I urge a favorable report for Senate Bill 400.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jill P. Carter". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jill P. Carter