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WRITTEN TESTIMONY

House Bill 128 – Criminal Law – Hate Crimes – Protected Groups and Penalties

Judiciary Committee

January 26, 2021

SUPPORT

Background: HB128 would allow a court to require an individual who is convicted of a hate crime to undergo an antibias education program to be developed by the Board of Regents. It also expands the protected classes of the hate crime statute to explicitly include gender-related identity or expression.

Written Comments: The Baltimore Jewish Council (BJC) and Maryland's Jewish community are concerned about the recent rise in hate/bias incidents in Maryland and the damaging effect that is having on our communities. These incidents are impacting not just Jewish communities, but those of other religions racial minorities and those in the LGBTQ+ community. According to the 2018 State of Maryland Hate/Bias Report authored by the Maryland State Police, there has been a sharp increase in hate/bias incidents over the past decade. 2018 saw the second-largest number of incidents in the last 10 years. Incidents were reported in all 24 jurisdictions with Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Howard, Montgomery, and Prince George's counties reporting the most incidents. These reported incidents targeted both individuals and some of our most vital arenas for community engagement, including schools, community centers, and places of worship. No place, person, place or part of our state is immune to these kinds of hateful incidents.

Education and understanding will always be the most powerful tools that we have for combating hate. If we truly want to make sure those who have committed hate crimes are able to grow from their past misdeeds, it is important that we are not just punishing offenders but using every tool in our arsenal to reduce the likelihood of them committing more acts of hate.

With this in mind, the Baltimore Jewish Council urges a favorable report on HB128.

The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of the Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.