
BILL NO.: House Bill 645
TITLE: Hate Crimes – False Statement to a Law Enforcement Officer
COMMITTEE: House Judiciary Committee
DATE: February 15, 2022
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

House Bill 645 seeks to address a very concerning, dangerous, and detrimental practice that has received national attention over the past few years. In particular HB645 will clarify that making a false statement to a law enforcement officer about another party, motivated either in whole, or substantial part, by the latter party's race, color, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender, disability, or national origin, or because another person or group is homeless, will be considered a hate crime.

Hate crimes are intended to intimidate not only the victim but also the victim's community, leaving them feeling isolated, vulnerable, and unprotected by the law. By making members of minority communities fearful, angry, and suspicious of other—and of the power structure that is supposed to protect them—these incidents can damage the fabric of our society and fragment communities. This has been most recently seen in the context of race, when Black men have repeatedly had the police called against them for partaking in legal activities such as sitting in Starbucks, attending a barbecue, or bird watching in a park. Weaponizing the police against communities already marginalized is dangerous, reprehensible, and should not be tolerated.

Hate crime laws matter. In addition to deterring criminal activity, they possess important symbolic meaning that signals to targeted communities that the government cares and that law enforcement will take their concerns seriously. Having worked with the Office of the Attorney General and a coalition of organizations for the past two years seeking to find ways to address the rise in hate crimes throughout the state, the WLC firmly believes that by passing legislation making clear such behavior is criminal, the legislature can assist in stopping these crimes from occurring in the future.

Therefore, the Women's Law Center urges support for House Bill 645.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a private, non-profit, legal services organization that serves as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women. It advocates for the rights of women through legal assistance to individuals and strategic initiatives to achieve systemic change, working to ensure physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy for women in Maryland.