

# 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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January 19, 2022

### **Senate Bill 71 – Hate Crimes – Civil Remedy 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 71 provides to a person who is the victim of a hate crime in Maryland, the right to bring a civil action against the person or persons who committed the violation. Maryland is, unfortunately, not immune from acts of hate and bias against members of our community. Each year the Maryland State Police (“MSP”) forwards a copy of the State of Maryland Hate/Bias Report to MCCR. In its most recent report for calendar year 2020, MSP received 382 individual reports of alleged acts of hate and bias, up from the 375 reported in 2018. This was an average of 32 reported incidents per month. These incidents can include, but are not limited to, bodily harm and property destruction. While the law currently has criminal penalties of a fine and/or imprisonment for perpetrators of hate crimes, this bill would provide a civil remedy for victims to recover economic and non-economic damages associated with the unlawful act.

If a victim of unlawful discrimination in employment or housing files a complaint with the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights, the Commission is authorized by Title 20 of the State Government Article to seek financial relief for the victims of proven discrimination. MCCR finds that the standard in SB 71 is consistent with the spirit of Title 20, and thus is an appropriate tool for a victim to seek relief for harm caused by an hate/bias act.

For these reasons, the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights urges a favorable vote on SB 71. 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.