

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 15, 2022

House Bill 645 – Hate Crimes - False Statement to a Law Enforcement Officer POSITION: Support

Dear Chairperson Clippinger, Vice Chairperson Moon, and Members of the House Judiciary 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.

House Bill 645 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 have seen, thanks to timely video, 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 notorious 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 Oregon state Representative while she was campaigning in her district or an African American apartment building employee harassed by a woman and her son, who assaulted the employee, because according to their 911 call, it was their business to know why he was at the complex.

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 HB 645 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.