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WRITTEN TESTIMONY

House Bill 290 – Hate Crimes – Civil Remedy

Judiciary Committee

February 2, 2022

SUPPORT

Background: House Bill 290 (HB290) allows a hate crime victim to bring a civil action against the person or persons who committed the crime. While common law allows for such action, HB290 codifies the common law. Further, the bill would clarify the common-law option for awarding reasonable attorney's fees for hate crimes. Lastly, the bill would allow for treble damages, an enhanced monetary penalty award for egregious crimes.

Written Comments: The Baltimore Jewish Council 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 many of our other faith partners. According to the 2019 State of Maryland Hate/Bias Report authored by the Maryland State Police, there has been a gradual increase in hate/bias incidents over the past decade. 2019 saw the second-largest number of incidents reported in the last 10 years. Incidents were reported in a majority of 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.

Over 30 other states have already codified civil actions for hate crimes. Maryland should follow in their steps so that a person or persons who are aggrieved by a violation of our hate crime laws can bring a civil action with enhanced penalties against the perpetrator of the crime.

With this in mind, the Baltimore Jewish Council urges a favorable report of HB290

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.

BALTIMORE JEWISH COUNCIL

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