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 Baltimore District

Written Testimony

**Senate Bill 785 - Maryland Department of Emergency Management – Office
 of Domestic Terrorism Response
 Judicial Proceedings Committee – Mach 1, 2023**

Support

Background: Senate Bill 785 would establish the Office of Domestic Terrorism Response within the Maryland Department of Emergency Management for the purpose of implementing measures to prepare for, prevent, and recover from domestic terrorism and hate crimes; and generally relating to emergency management and the Office of Domestic Terrorism Response. The creation of the office is the explicit recommendation of Maryland’s Task Force on Preventing and Countering Domestic Terrorism, which was first convened in fall 2021.

Written Comments: The Baltimore Jewish Council represents The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore and all of its agencies. The BJC’s responsibilities include helping to coordinate security preparations, trainings, and responses for The Associated system and the Jewish community institutions in most Maryland jurisdictions.

Domestic terrorism continues to be an increasing threat across our country. Just last month, the FBI stopped a plot by two neo-Nazis to target several BGE electric substations with gunfire in Baltimore County. This past weekend, we experienced a nationwide alert for a “Day of Hate” from far-right groups, prompting heightened patrols and vigilance across communities.

Statistics also show a significant rise in antisemitic incidents in Maryland. ADL reports a 17% increase in Maryland. Additionally, according to the Maryland State Police’s 2021 Hate Bias Report, anti-Jewish hate crime incidents account for more than 1 in 10 hate crime incidents, the second highest bias after anti-Black hate crimes.

To help address this unending threat, Maryland’s Task Force on Preventing and Countering Domestic Terrorism was first convened in Fall 2021, with a goal of determining how to effectively oppose domestic terrorism in Maryland, including, but not limited to, countering online extremism while protecting First Amendment rights. Membership included representatives from the Governor’s Office of Crime Control and Prevention, State Police, the House of Delegates, the Office of the Attorney General, the Public Defender's

Office, the Anti-Defamation League, the NAACP, U.S. Dept of Homeland Security, and many other interested parties, including the Baltimore Jewish Council.

The creation of an Office of Domestic Terrorism Response is also critical to implement the other recommendations of Maryland's task force, including:

- Investing in a permanent State of Maryland capability focused on violent extremism prevention to include not only domestic terrorism but also homegrown violent extremism associated with international terrorism, as well as hate crimes.
- Adopting an approach to violence prevention that includes primary prevention (e.g., raising awareness of violent extremism, increasing trust and lines of communication between communities and local government), secondary prevention (e.g., multidisciplinary interventions for at-risk individuals), and tertiary prevention (e.g., rehabilitation and reintegration).

By establishing a formal Office of Domestic Terrorism Response under the Department of Emergency Management with the goal of preparing, preventing, and recovering from these malicious acts, we believe that not only the Jewish Community, but all other communities that are victims of hate crimes, will be better protected.

For these reasons, the Baltimore Jewish Council asks for a favorable report on SB785 to assist our state's collective fight against hate, antisemitism, extremism, and domestic terrorism.

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.