



Maryland General Assembly
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
April 6, 2023

Testimony of Meredith R. Weisel
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ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) is pleased to submit this testimony in **support of *HB1066, Hate Crimes – Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention – Establishment***, a bill that would establish a commission to develop strategies to prevent and respond to hate crime activity and evaluate State laws and policies relating to hate crimes.

Since 1913, the mission of ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) has been to “stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” For decades, one of the most important ways in which ADL has fought against bigotry and antisemitism has been by investigating extremist threats across the ideological spectrum, including from white supremacists and other far-right violent extremists, producing research to inform the public, and working with law enforcement, educators, the tech industry, and elected leaders to promote best practices to effectively address and counter these threats. Further, ADL conducts an annual *Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents*, which is widely used by law enforcement, elected officials, and the community at-large to not only understand how to respond to antisemitic incidents, but how to create change.

Related to this work, ADL has long been recognized as a leading resource on effective responses to violent bigotry, including hate crimes. In 1981, ADL crafted the first model hate crime law in the country, and today, 46 states, as well as the District of Columbia, have hate crime laws, many of which are based on or substantially similar to our model, which was unanimously upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court. We were also privileged to lead a broad coalition of civil rights, religious, educational, professional, law enforcement, and civic organizations for more than a decade in support of the 2009 Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act (HCPA).

Behind every hate crime statistic, there is a person, a family, a community – dealing with the unimaginable. Hate crimes cause a distinct type of harm that can have a lasting, immeasurable impact. This is because hate crimes target people due to their protected, immutable characteristics – race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, sex, gender, gender identity, disability – things about a person that are central to identity and cannot be changed.

ADL is proud to be a leading anti-hate organization that has been able to help thousands of people who report hate and bias incidents to us. We have been able to help communities across the country by reporting on trends, educating lawmakers and law enforcement and advocating for stronger protections against incidents and crimes. ADL has been a part of the Maryland Attorney General’s hate crimes working group since its inception and we look forward to being a part of this extremely important commission.

There is unfortunately no magic wand that we can wave to undo the irreparable harm that hate crimes cause. Yet here in Maryland, we can make sure that our laws and our policies are crafted in a way that will help stem the rising tide and, to the maximum extent possible, help make victims whole. And while there is no single fix to the alarming trend of hate crimes and bias incidents, together we can take meaningful action to fight hate for good by creating this important commission.

We accordingly urge the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to give HB1066 a favorable report.