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HB 1066

March 9, 2023

TO: Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Interim Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: House Bill 1066 – Hate Crimes – Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention – Establishment

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) supports House Bill (HB) 1066.

HB1066 establishes a hate crime response and prevention commission in the Maryland Office of the Attorney General (OAG). It also establishes the terms and conditions for members appointed to this commission, funding requirements for fiscal year 2025 and beyond, and the specific duties of the commission. HB1066 states that the commission will develop strategies to prevent and respond to hate crime, evaluate laws relating to hate crime, and report policy recommendations to address hate crime to specific entities.

After reports of hate crimes first spiked in late 2016, then Attorney General Brian Frosh issued a public reminder that persons engaging in malicious conduct motivated by a victim's race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, disability or homeless status, risk civil liability or criminal prosecution under Maryland's laws. Frosh also established a Hate Crimes Hotline in the OAG to collect data on hate incidents and make referrals to entities authorized to address the conduct. The OAG also formed a working group of human relations and rights agencies and organizations focused on hate crimes in 2019, which the Office of Equity and Civil Rights (OECR) has participated in since 2019.

Just last month, a federal grand jury in Maryland returned an indictment charging two individuals with conspiracy to destroy an energy facility in furtherance of racially and ethnically motivated violent extremist beliefs. The alleged planned attack threatened lives and would have left thousands of citizens of color in the cold and dark, as the two individuals planned to target multiple electrical substations around Baltimore City to "completely destroy" and "permanently completely lay [the] city to waste." This commission can provide excellent information to the United States Attorney for the District of Maryland in these instances.

For these reasons, the BCA respectfully requests a favorable report on HB1066.