
BILL NO.: House Bill 1066
TITLE: Hate Crimes - Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention -
Establishment
COMMITTEE: Judiciary
DATE: March 9, 2023
POSITION: **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**

House Bill 1066 will codify the work of many years of collaborative efforts between statewide organizations united against hate crimes and other biased based criminal acts by creating the Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention. The Commission, chaired by the Attorney General, will be comprised of representatives from various communities disproportionately targeted by hate and bias crimes, and be tasked with developing strategies to prevent and respond to hate crimes as well as evaluate state laws and policies relating to hate crimes. The Women's Law Center of Maryland (WLC) is proud to have partnered with the Maryland Office of the Attorney General and many of the organizations listed within the bill, for the past several years on these issues. We believe formalizing the work through a Commission is an important step in addressing the harm caused by these acts.

Hate crime laws matter. In addition to deterring criminal activity, they possess important symbolic meaning that signals to targeted communities that the government cares and that law enforcement will take their concerns seriously. HB 1066 would provide a vehicle for ensuring that our hate crime laws help to create a more just and equitable society and the WLC is very supportive of this legislation.

The WLC would, however, respectfully request amending the bill to include a representative from a women's rights organization on the Commission. Maryland women have one of the highest lifetime prevalence of rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in the country¹. Nationally, research shows a startling link between violence against women and mass shootings, with approximately 60% of mass shootings either domestically related or committed by men with histories of domestic violence². And internationally, the World Health Organization found that 1 in 3 women around the world experiences sexual or physical violence in their lifetime³. All because they are women. While gender-based violence has historically been framed as a problem of individual acts of violence rather than a systemic issue of discrimination and bias against women, there has been a growing recognition of the need to include it within hate crime laws. Maryland amended its hate crime statute in 2009 to include gender as a protected class, recognizing the need for more comprehensive laws and policies to address gender-based violence. Including a women's rights advocate on the Commission will support that goal.

As such, the WLC respectfully urges a favorable report, with the amendment noted above, on HB 1066. For more information, please contact Michelle Siri at msiri@wlcmd.org.

¹ [Maryland Commission for Women, Who We Represent](#)

² [Mass Shooters Often Have a History of Violence Against Women](#), 03/21/21, National Public Radio

³ [Violence Against Women, World Health Organization](#), 03/09/21

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a private, non-profit, legal services organization that serves as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women. It advocates for the rights of women through legal assistance to individuals and strategic initiatives to achieve systemic change, working to ensure physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy for women in Maryland.