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Testimony of Delegate Samuel I. Rosenberg

Before the House Appropriations Committee

in Support of House Bill 1154

**Maryland Department of Emergency Management –  
Office of Domestic Terrorism Response**

Mister Chair and Members of the Committee:

We have seen the carnage violent extremism leaves on minority and other communities. The FBI intervening to thwart a plot by two neo-Nazis to target several BGE electric substations with gunfire in Baltimore County; Jewish communities across the country encountering online threats for a “Day of Hate” from far-right groups, forcing extra police patrols, extra security, and extra vigilance at synagogues and in heavily Jewish neighborhoods.

More recently, the horrific events of October 7<sup>th</sup> in Israel have substantially increased threats against communities across Maryland, going beyond Jewish communities. In addition, our state contains a number of potential high-profile targets for domestic terrorists, ranging from LNG facilities in Southern Maryland to federal military facilities to transportation hubs along the Baltimore Harbor, to the many federal officials who live in the Washington suburbs.

In other states, we have seen murders against the LGBTQ community in Colorado Springs resulting in 5 people killed and 25 wounded, and the racism-inspired shooting in a grocery store in Buffalo resulting in 10 people killed and 3 wounded.

Let us not forget the 2017 murder of Richard Collins, a Bowie State ROTC Candidate, who was murdered by an “alt-right” extremist. We must take the initiative against extremist behavior so that we keep Maryland families and communities safe.

We can and must do so consistent with the First Amendment.

In December 2022, The Maryland Office of Emergency Management submitted a summary report with recommendations from its Task Force on Preventing and Countering Domestic Terrorism. The report proposes important actions we can take to combat domestic terrorism in Maryland.

House Bill 1154 would codify the recommendations of the Task Force and make clear that Maryland will vigilantly oppose all forms of violent extremism. It would establish an Office of Domestic Terrorism Response in the Department of Emergency Management.

The bill also requires the Office to report annually to the General Assembly and the Governor on its activities, legislation, and the resources it needs to carry out its purpose and duties. The passage of HB 1154 would formalize the coordination between various state actors and strengthen our capabilities to address and prevent violent extremism.

Fortunately, the Moore-Miller Administration has shared its commitment to creating a safer Maryland for all by acknowledging the real threat and risk domestic terrorism poses here. One of the key recommendations of the task force was to create and *“establish a permanent coordinating office – equipped with financial and personnel resources, executive authority, and a chain of command – intended to facilitate a multidisciplinary and multisectoral task force to advance this mission.”*

Specifically, the task force studied at length for over two years the challenges with violent extremism and approaches to violence prevention. The following additional recommendations were made:

- Invest in a permanent task force that is 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.
- Adopt 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).

Advocates are in discussion with the Governor’s Office of Homeland Security (GOHS) to understand how GOHS can accomplish these recommendations utilizing the resources currently available. We hope that GOHS can commit to bringing together members of the task force together on a quarterly basis to monitor, research and identify trends, and to implement best practices to combat extremism in Maryland. This includes fulfilling one of the requirements of HB1154: for the Governor to create a permanent Office of Domestic Terrorism. This commitment should include **a designated staff member assigned within GOHS to oversee this work.**

With full understanding that work is ongoing with the Moore-Miller administration, I urge the committee to give HB 1154 a favorable report.

March 6, 2024