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 Baltimore District

Written Testimony

**House Bill 1154 - Maryland Department of Emergency Management – Office
 of Domestic Terrorism Response
 Appropriations Committee – March 5, 2024**

Support

Background: House Bill 1154 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. Numerous threats have been identified and stopped over the past several years, and the horrific events of October 7th have substantially increased threats against not just the Jewish community, but communities across Maryland. 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.

Statistics also show a significant rise in antisemitic incidents in Maryland. Since October 7th, 2023, the ADL reports a nearly 400% increase in antisemitic incidents nationally compared to the same period in 2022. Both the Maryland State Police and ADL report record numbers of hate crime incidents against the Jewish community in 2022 (the most recent available data), and those numbers are expected to be significantly higher when the 2023 data is released.

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).
- Requiring a report annually by December 1 to the Governor and the General Assembly on the Office's activities, proposed legislation, and required resources.

We understand there are discussions with the Governor's Office as to where to place the Office of Domestic Terrorism Response. While the bill proposes that it be placed under the Department of Emergency Management, we are comfortable with a proposed alternative of putting it within the Governor's Office of Homeland Security.

For these reasons, the Baltimore Jewish Council asks for a favorable report on HB1154 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.