



**Testimony in SUPPORT of *House Bill 809*–
Members of Boards, Committees, Commissions, Task Forces or Workgroups –
Removal or Suspension
Health and Government Operations Committee
February 20, 2024**

The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (JCRC) serves as the public affairs and community relations arm of the Jewish community. We represent over 100 Jewish organizations and synagogues throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, and pluralism. We work throughout the region to advocate for our agencies that serve the most vulnerable residents and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the Jewish community and all Marylanders.

The JCRC supports House Bill 809- Members of Boards, Committees, Commissions, Task Forces, or Workgroups- Removal or Suspension. Our organization is one of 23 members of the State’s Commission on Hate Crimes Response and Prevention. This Commission is tasked with eradicating hate crimes and bias incidents and with supporting individuals and communities victimized by hate. Right now, our Jewish community is under assault. According to the ADL, antisemitic incidents in 2022 surged to the highest level ever with Maryland seeing a 98% increase. In Montgomery County, incidents were up 261%. And since the horrific Hamas terrorist attack in Israel on October 7th, antisemitic incidents have skyrocketed 361% compared to the same period in the previous year.

This Commission – chaired by the Attorney General -is critical in helping not only the Jewish community, but all marginalized racial, ethnic, faith and LGBTQ+ communities- to combat hatred and feel safe & secure. The commission can NOT do that work if its members don’t abide by core values such as respect, empathy, and professionalism. It cannot function if the Attorney General doesn’t have the power to remove members for justified reasons as outlined in the Bill.

When this Commission was established last year, there were no guiding principles or code of conduct, including standards of public communications on social media. Also, there was no mechanism created for the Attorney General to remove a member if they violated the code of conduct. HB 809 fills this vacuum. It will give the Attorney General the authority to suspend or remove a member for misconduct, incompetence, neglect of duties, or any other cause deemed reasonable. Members must hold themselves to the highest level of accountability and integrity.

If they no longer represent the best interest of the group, the Attorney General must have the ability to remove them. For this reason, we ask for a favorable report on House Bill 809.