



**Testimony in SUPPORT of *Senate Bill 650–*
Criminal Law – Hate Crimes – Notice and Removal of Item or Symbol
Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 21, 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 Senate Bill 650 which requires law enforcement agencies to promptly notify property owners about items or symbols inscribed on their property. It also requires those owners to remove the symbols within 24 hours after being reported to law enforcement. If the property owners do not comply, they could be fined up to \$1000 dollars. This Bill does not apply to property owners who were the intended target of the alleged violation.

The Jewish community is living in a time of heightened and unprecedented antisemitism. Swastikas, nooses, KKK graffiti, and other symbols of hate – including messages that say, “Kill all Jews,” “Hitler was right,” or “Jews not welcome” – are seen defacing buildings and neighborhoods where children walk to school, and families attend synagogue. These symbols are not only disturbing but can cause real harm and threaten one’s sense of security. The ADL reports that in 2022, antisemitic incidents were up 98% in Maryland from the previous year. This spike includes vandalism which jumped 79%. In Montgomery County, the latest report on religious bias incidents shows that more than 85% targeted Jews, although they make up only 10% of the County population. Finally, since the October 7th Hamas attack in Israel, antisemitic incidents nationwide have reached the highest point of any three-month period since the ADL began tracking in 1979. The ADL recorded a total of 3283 antisemitic incidents across the nation, representing a 361% increase compared to the same period one year prior.

SB 650 will go a long way in making the Jewish community feel safer in its neighborhoods. Owners must take responsibility for their property and remove hateful symbols within 24 hours of being reported. This action will reduce the harm marginalized communities feel when seeing symbols of hate on buildings. For the Jewish community, its mere presence creates a pall; a reminder of the Nazi era where these signs were everywhere. For these reasons we urge a favorable report for Senate Bill 650.

