

Maryland General Assembly
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 20, 2024

Testimony of Meredith R. Weisel
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ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) is pleased to submit this testimony in **support of SB650, Criminal Law – Hate Crimes – Notice and Removal of Item or Symbol** which would require law enforcement agencies to promptly notify certain property owners of a report of certain items or symbols that constitute an alleged hate crime and require that the items or symbols be removed within 24 hours after the report or notice is made.

Since 1913, the mission of ADL has been to “stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” Over the past three decades, ADL has been recognized as a leading resource on effective responses to violent bigotry at both the state and federal level. We frequently assist in drafting model hate crime statutes for state legislatures, and we were also privileged to lead a broad coalition of civil rights, religious, educational, professional, law enforcement, and civic organizations working in support of the 2009 Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act (“HCPA”) for more than a decade.

Hate crime vandalism is unfortunately a serious concern in Maryland. In the **2021 Maryland Hate and Bias Report** from the Maryland State Police and the Maryland Coordination and Analysis Center, **27.7%** incidents were reported as vandalism and malicious destruction of property. In the **2022 Maryland Hate and Bias Report** vandalism and malicious destruction of property went up to **29.6%**. The report indicates that vandalism incidents are the most common hate crime offense type in both 2021 and 2022. This data is consistent with ADL’s Audit of Antisemitic Incidents, which specifically tracks a broader set of incidents of vandalism, harassment and assault across the country. In 2022, ADL documented 109 antisemitic incidents in Maryland, 43 of which were vandalism related. We are expecting that number to go even higher for our 2023 audit data to be released later this Spring.

Hateful vandalism incidents are intended to intimidate and terrorize not just the individual whose property is targeted, but entire communities. Their impact, therefore, cannot be measured solely in terms of dollars and cents. This has been particularly true in the wake of the racist, antisemitic and anti-LGBTQ+ vandalism incidents we are continuing to see throughout the entire state. Swastikas regularly being reported in apartment buildings, at shopping centers, near synagogues, or racist images and graffiti near schools, and anti-LGBTQ+ images and words spraypainted on sidewalks or near people’s homes.

At a time when hate and extremism are on the rise, it is critical that Maryland residents and business owners, as well as localities, have the tools they need to address it. **SB650** will help ensure that localities are able to swiftly and expeditiously remove hate symbol defacement from public property and acknowledge the sensitivity to private property owners in the wake of these attacks, giving them the opportunity to conceal the unauthorized and unlawful vandalism before it is removed. We hope that the legislature will continue to support property owners who are already facing trauma and harm due to the impact of the hateful graffiti on their property.

We urge the Committee to release SB650 with a favorable report.