



Maryland General Assembly
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
March 27, 2024

Testimony of Meredith R. Weisel
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ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) submits this testimony in **support of HB763, Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention – Membership – Alterations**, which would alter the makeup of the members represented on the commission. We would like to note our original testimony below from the House hearing and express support for the amended version of HB763 now. Although we would have liked to see the bill passed in its original form, and are disappointed that certain organizations are not named anymore, we believe it is crucial that we have representatives on the commission who are willing to be collaborative and show leadership in fighting all forms of hate.

ADL (the Anti-Defamation League)

Since 1913, the mission of ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) has been to “stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” For decades, one of the most important ways in which ADL has fought against bigotry and antisemitism has been by investigating extremist threats across the ideological spectrum and by working with law enforcement, educators, the tech industry, and elected leaders to promote best practices to effectively address and counter these threats. Further, ADL conducts an annual *Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents*, which is widely used by law enforcement, elected officials, and the community at-large to not only understand how to respond to antisemitic incidents, but how to create change.

Related to this work, ADL has long been recognized as a leading resource on effective responses to violent bigotry, including hate crimes. In 1981, ADL crafted the first model hate crime law in the country, and today, 46 states, as well as the District of Columbia, have hate crime laws, many of which are based on or substantially similar to our model, which was unanimously upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court. We were also privileged to lead a broad coalition of civil rights, religious, educational, professional, law enforcement, and civic organizations for more than a decade in support of the 2009 Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act (HCPA).

Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention

During the 2023 Maryland General Assembly session, ADL fully supported **HB1066, Hate Crimes – Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention – Establishment**, which established a commission to develop strategies to prevent and respond to hate crime activity and evaluate state laws and policies relating to hate crimes. As an organization that had been involved in the Attorney General working group on hate crimes and bias incidents from its

inception, we felt it was urgent to formalize the creation of a full commission to carry out this work.

It's important to remember that behind every hate crime statistic, there is a person, a family, a community – dealing with the unimaginable. Hate crimes cause a distinct type of harm that can have a lasting, immeasurable impact. This is because hate crimes target people due to their protected, immutable characteristics – race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, sex, gender, gender identity, disability – things about a person that are central to identity and cannot be changed.

ADL is proud to be a leading anti-hate organization that has been able to help thousands of people who report hate and bias incidents to us. We are honored to be a part of this Commission entrusted with developing policy solutions to better support communities disproportionately impacted by hate-fueled violence.

House Bill 763

Unfortunately, the work of the Hate Crime Response and Prevention Commission has been disrupted by one organization appointed last year. In addition to concerns that have been raised by community members regarding CAIR's support of parental opt-outs of LGBTQ+-inclusive curricula in Montgomery County, since the brutal massacre in Israel on October 7th by Hamas, a State Department-designated foreign terrorist organization, there have been many troubling social media posts and statements made by CAIR at both the national level and by CAIR's Maryland Director. Unfortunately, these posts and statements have been part of a pattern denying the larger Jewish community's suffering after the brutal massacre on October 7th. This unprovoked war has had a great impact throughout the world, resulting in a close to 400% rise in antisemitic incidents throughout the U.S., including a number of incidents in Maryland.

As leaders trusted with developing policy solutions to counter hate, it's disappointing and concerning that inflammatory rhetoric is being used instead of finding ways to bring people together. We may have disagreements on the policies in Israel and Gaza, but to make posts like "disrupting the Zionist agenda has become a favorite hobby" or calling Hamas terrorists "Palestinian Freedom Fighters" and using Holocaust distortion is deeply concerning for the Jewish community.

Here in Maryland, we have an important obligation and unique opportunity to develop policy solutions that help counter hate targeting all marginalized groups. That is how we build a safer, stronger, and more equitable society in the future. Any Commission set up to respond to and prevent hate crimes and bias in our communities should be comprised of members who are committed to building bridges of understanding across communities and countering identity-based hate whenever and wherever it may arise.

We urge the Committee to release HB763 with a favorable report.