



**Testimony in SUPPORT of *House Bill 1041*–  
*Criminal Law – Hate Crimes – Religion and Disability*  
Judiciary 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 has a long history of prioritizing the needs and rights of people with disabilities. Although current law protects people with disability from hate crimes, it does not define “disability”. Under House Bill 1041, “disability” will be defined by the federal *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)* of 1990. We are committed to supporting policy measures to empower individuals with disabilities to achieve maximum independence and break down barriers to inclusion.

House Bill 1041 also expands the definition of a hate crime based on a person’s “religion”. Current state law only protects a person’s “religious belief”. Given the explosion of antisemitism and hate crimes committed against Jewish people because of their Jewish religion, HB 1041 is of paramount importance to the JCRC. According to the ADL, hate crimes and bias incidents against the Jewish community continue to rise at a disturbing rate. In 2022, incidents were up 98% in Maryland from the previous year. Additionally, Montgomery County Police Department’s latest report on religious bias incidents shows that more than 85% targeted Jews, although they only make up only 10% of the County population.

Hate crimes are exploding against Jewish people because of their religion, not just their religious beliefs. A recent survey by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) reported that 63% of Jews—that is people defined not by their beliefs, but by their religion (Jewish) – feel less secure today than a year ago, that’s a 50% increase from the previous year. And for younger Jewish people, the statistics are more alarming: At least 1 in 4 college students avoid wearing, carrying, or displaying items that would identify them as Jewish for fear of antisemitism. For these reasons, we support House Bill 1041.