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**WRITTEN TESTIMONY**

**House Bill 1041 Criminal Law - Hate Crimes - Religion and Disability**

**Judiciary Committee**

**February 20, 2024**

**SUPPORT**

**Background:** House Bill 1041 (HB1041) expands Maryland's Hate Crimes Statute by: 1) defining disability and 2) adding religion as a motivation for a hate crime.

**Written Comments:** The Baltimore Jewish Council and Maryland's Jewish community are concerned about the recent rise in hate/bias incidents in Maryland and the damaging effect that is having on our communities. These incidents are impacting not just Jewish communities, but those of many of our other faith partners. According to the 2022 State of Maryland Hate/Bias Report authored by the Maryland State Police, Maryland experienced 311 reports, an increase from 2021, further anti-religious incidents in Maryland increased by over 84%, the vast majority of which were targeted at the Jewish community. This report does not factor in the extreme increase of almost 400% nationwide of antisemitic incidents since the Hamas terrorist attacks on October 7<sup>th</sup>.

While Maryland's hate crimes statute identifies religious beliefs as a motive for hate crimes, it does not include the term most often used in other states, religion. Someone could be a target of hate crime not because of their religious beliefs, but because of their religion, (or the religion the perpetrator thinks the victim is). For instance, you could be a Catholic atheist or someone with Jewish ancestry but not practicing the religious beliefs of Judaism. Another common hate crime is against the Sikh community who are often targeted because people believe they are Muslim due to their turbans. It is time Maryland joined the vast majority of states and include religion as a motive for hate crimes.

With this in mind, the Baltimore Jewish Council urges a favorable report of HB1041.

*The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of The Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish com*