



# State of Maryland Commission on Civil Rights

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**February 20, 2024**

## **House Bill 1041 Criminal Law - Hate Crimes - Religion and Disability POSITION: Support**

Dear Chair, Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (“MCCR”; “The Commission”) is the State agency responsible for the enforcement of laws prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, health services and state contracts based upon race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, physical and mental disability, and source of income.

House Bill 1041 would add “religion” and “disability” to the law prohibiting hate crimes. Hate crimes are crimes that are committed against a person that are motivated by that person’s race, color, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, disability, national origin, or because another person or group is homeless.

Hate crimes have been on the rise across the nation. Often current events can inform the ebb and flow of hate crime statistics. For example, racially charged hate crimes are notably consistent but during the COVID-19 Pandemic, Asian-Americans began to experience a significant spike in hate crimes. Presently, we have seen an increased level of antisemitism and islamophobia since the war in Gaza.

This country was founded on the idea of freedom of religion and its importance to some Americans cannot be overstated. Religion should be especially protected in the face of discriminatory animus and criminal activity. These protections should extend further than religious practices and encompass the culture that comes along with identifying as a particular religion.

Disabled people are also often discriminated against in various ways. For example, a recent news story from the 2023 winter holidays involved baggage handlers at American Airlines. A video shows an employee throwing a wheelchair down a tall ramp and the wheelchair bounces and tumbles down the ramp, goes up and over the divide, and scrapes across the concrete. Many people were offended by this aggression and many disabled individuals felt vindicated by the video evidence after suffering years of abuse of their essential devices by airlines. This kind of treatment is not abnormal or limited to support devices, as disabled

*“Our vision is to have a State that is free from any trace of unlawful discrimination.”*

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Americans are twice as likely to be subject of a violent crime than non-disabled individuals. It is important to provide disabled Marylanders with protection from hate crimes.

For these reasons, the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights urges a favorable vote on HB 1041. Thank you for your time and consideration of the information contained in this letter. The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights looks forward to the continued opportunity to work with you to improve and promote civil rights in Maryland.