

House Bill 1370

Testimony from Nicole Kashtan, Maryland Resident

My name is Nicole Kashtan, and I am writing today in support of House Bill 1370. As a Jewish parent of two young kids in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) I know firsthand that it is imperative that all teachers across Montgomery County receive robust training on antisemitism. Teachers are the first line of defense when antisemitic actions occur and must have the knowledge and tools to identify and disrupt antisemitic behavior in their classrooms.

The bill requires training to combat both Antisemitism and Islamophobia, and while I agree that all forms of bigotry are unacceptable and that educators should be equipped to combat both, there is a stark difference in the prevalence of these bigotries in Montgomery County Public Schools, and it is therefore important that efforts to combat Islamophobia, which has not been particularly prevalent, do not inhibit efforts to combat Antisemitism, which is far and away the most prevalent form of bigotry – religious or otherwise – in MCPS.

Last month, the website Moderately Moco¹ published a study, which analyzed all hate/bias incidents in schools from July 2022 through October 2023, citing the Montgomery County Police Departments Hate Bias Summaries. The study was unique in that it compared all forms of bigotry, religious, racial, sexual orientation, disability, etc. and was therefore able to identify those groups that were most frequently targeted.

According to the study, a substantial majority of 61% of all hate incidents in schools, targeted the Jewish community. Collectively, the bigotry targeting the Jewish, Black and LGBTQ+ communities accounted for over 90% of all incidents. Meanwhile, over the entire time period covered by the study, there was only one incident that was classified as anti-Arab and Anti-Islamic, compared to 83 anti-Jewish incidents.

Accordingly, I propose amending this bill to state that “prioritization, resource allocation, and stakeholder input shall take into account frequencies of bias, discrimination, and/or hate incidents against each religious group, as may be reflected in federal, state or local law enforcement records tracking such incidents.”

Given the explosion of antisemitism in Maryland, especially in schools and amongst young people, this legislation cannot wait. Please pass House Bill 1370.

¹ Opinion: MCPS must combat antisemitism in its schools | MoCo360. (2024, January 21). *Hate's hidden home: Exposing the stark reality of Anti-Jewish incidents in Montgomery County Maryland where "hate has no home" and MCPS (Montgomery County Public Schools)*. Moderately MOCO. <https://moderatelymoco.com/hates-hidden-home-exposing-the-stark-reality-of-anti-jewish-incidents-in-montgomery-county-md-where-hate-has-no-home-and-mcps/>

