

## **Montgomery County Jewish Parents Coalition Written Testimony: House Bill 1370, Montgomery County Public Schools – School Personnel Training – Religious Discrimination Prevention**

Montgomery County Jewish Parents Coalition (MoCo JPC) supports House Bill 1370 with amendments. Should the bill pass, it would be a step in the right direction, but there is one important issue that should be considered.

The bill requires training to combat antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of religious bias and discrimination, and while we agree that all forms of religious 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 (MCPS), and it is therefore important that efforts to combat Islamophobia, or other religious biases, which have 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 Moco<sup>1</sup> published a study, which analyzed all hate/bias incidents in county schools from July 2022 through October 2023, citing the Montgomery County Police Department’s 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, 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.

Moreover, at the February 2 hearing on this legislation, a speaker from the Muslim Voices Coalition offered unfortunate remarks about the “weaponization of antisemitism,” as if the rampant bigotry against the Jewish community, and especially against our children, should be seen as an infringement on the free speech rights of those who engage in the bigotry. This is an obstruction of progress that has become commonplace in the Jewish community’s effort to combat antisemitism.

Accordingly, we 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.”

We also propose a second amendment, with the purpose of strengthening this bill in terms of accountability and transparency: “Training must occur at least annually, and its efficacy must be measured annually and the results, and the training, must be made available to the public.”

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<sup>1</sup> 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-incident-in-montgomery-county-md-where-hate-has-no-home-and-mcps/>

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While today it is the Jewish community that is the target of 61% of all hate incidents in our county schools, history has taught us that what starts with the Jewish people never ends with the Jewish people. The hope is that if this bill is successfully implemented, especially with these proposed amendments included, a day may come when the Jewish community, especially our children, is no longer targeted. When that day comes, the interests of cultural diversity will undoubtedly be served by school systems focusing on combatting whatever bigotries may emerge as the most prevalent of the time.

Thank you.