



## WRITTEN TESTIMONY

### FAVORABLE

#### **HB 1462- Higher Education - Antihate and Antidiscrimination Policies and Workgroup (Maryland Campus Accountability and Modernization to Protect University Students Act)**

Ways & Means Committee

March 5, 2025

The Maryland Legislative Jewish Caucus (MLJC), a bipartisan group of Senators and Delegates, **strongly supports** HB 1462, requiring Maryland's higher education institutions to develop a procedure to prepare, respond, and mitigate incidents of bias-related harassment or discrimination.

HB 1462, which aligns with MLJC's mission of combating hate crimes and bias-related incidents, has been proposed at a critical time. Over the last year, college campuses have been deeply impacted by antisemitism and Islamophobia. According to Hillel International and Muslim Campus Life, there were 834 additional antisemitic incidents and 98 additional Islamophobic incidents, nationwide, during the 2023-2024 academic year, compared to the previous year. Data from January 2025 suggest we are on track to see an even greater number of incidents this year.

HB 1462 takes a multi-pronged approach to help colleges and universities effectively reduce bias and discrimination. Through reactive, proactive, transparency, and tracking measures, this bill will help ensure Maryland colleges are welcoming and tolerant spaces for all students:

- **Proactive**—the legislation requires new policies to help institutions more effectively curb the growing trend of discriminatory incidents on college campuses. By requiring institutions to provide anti-bias training to faculty and staff, appropriating funds to promote intercultural connection, and establishing a workgroup focused on combating antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other types of hate and bias, the rate of bias-related incidents on campuses should hopefully decrease.

- **Reactive**—the legislation also seeks to improve how educational institutions respond to bias-related and discriminatory incidents. By requiring colleges to develop anti-bias policies that include a system for reporting complaints and threats and the disciplinary actions that may follow investigations, this legislation will ensure educational institutions can respond adequately to bias-related incidents and harassment.
- **Transparency**—this legislation ensures that students can fully exercise their First Amendment Right to free speech while ensuring the student body is safe and educational activities aren't disrupted. Under HB 1462, institutions must clearly publish their time, place, and manner policy for expressive activity on their website, establish a procedure for assessing and alerting the community about potential threats to public safety from expressive activity, and ensure the police are as involved as necessary. To ensure students have an opportunity to engage around critical issues on campus, the legislation requires a senior administrator to meet with certain types of student groups annually.
- **Tracking**—this legislation requires the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) to publish a report detailing the trends in bias-related incidents across the state as compiled by reports submitted by individual institutions. These reports will inform legislators and policymakers to assist institutions in identifying patterns and keep communities informed. Each college or university must also have its diversity office recognize the five demographic groups with the highest rates of bias-related incidents as determined by the annual Maryland State Police "Hate and Bias Report."

HB 1462 comprehensively tackles bias-related incidents on college campuses while balancing students' fundamental right to free expression, signaling Maryland's commitment to promoting tolerance and freedom.

For these reasons, we respectfully request a favorable report.