

March 3, 2025

**Testimony on SB0847—Position: Unfavorable**  
**Higher Education - Antihate and Antidiscrimination Policies and Workgroup (Maryland**  
**Campus Accountability and Modernization to Protect University Students Act)**

TO: Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and the members of the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

FROM: David Wolfe, Silver Spring, MD 20902, on behalf of the Montgomery County Jewish Collective

My name is David Wolfe and I am a resident of Maryland District 18. I am writing as a representative of the Montgomery County Jewish Collective. The Montgomery County Jewish Collective (MCJC) is a new Jewish communal and advocacy organization committed to collective liberation as the cornerstone of a vibrant, safe, and supportive Jewish community and a safe and equitable county and state for all. We came together in response to the genocide in Gaza, sharing sadness and anger at the failure of our Jewish community institutions to recognize the value of Palestinian lives. We strongly believe that both criticism of Israel and pro-Palestinian speech must be protected. Given this, and given the clear suppression of such speech on college campuses last year, we have serious concerns about SB847.

I am also writing as a student at University of Maryland Baltimore studying for a Masters of Social Work and as a proud Jew. I wear a Star of David every day, I have Hebrew writing on my backpack, and I wear a yarmulke on shabbat and on holidays. I am not fearful of expressing my Jewish identity on campus and have never been discriminated against or harassed for it. I am fearful, however, of being discriminated against for my belief in the rights of the Palestinian people. I am fearful today, of testifying against this bill, knowing that around that country college students have been wrongly punished for expressing support for Palestinian rights. I am fearful that this bill will make it easier for students like me to be retaliated against for using our protected speech rights. I express my beliefs on my campus, in my classes, and in this testimony despite this fear because I know the cause is moral.

The Montgomery County Jewish Collective appreciates the stated intentions of this bill. All college students in the state should feel safe and protected from discriminatory speech and actions. At the same time, we believe that the problem of hate on college campuses has been greatly exaggerated for expressly political purposes, and we do not believe that this legislation is

necessary to make safety a reality. Most if not all of our universities already have anti-hate and anti-discrimination policies and procedures concerning protected classes, including religious identity. Any threats to the safety of students—emotional or physical— can be addressed by the policies and procedures currently in place. It is fundamentally unnecessary to introduce legislation unless the intent is in fact to push universities to crack down further on protest.

Last year, college students across the United States organized in support of Palestine. In Maryland, although we do not find the response of our universities to have been perfect, we did not see anything like the worst examples of suppression that occurred elsewhere. But we fear that the provisions of the bill will provide legislative sanction for exactly the kind of suppression of speech that we saw elsewhere in the United States. On the face of it, this bill appears neutral. But in our political context, there is no way that it can be. Since October 7, 2023, universities across the country, in concert with local law enforcement bodies, have used anti-hate and anti-discrimination policies and time, place, and manner rules to shut down *one* kind of student protest. In some glaring cases, they *failed* to apply the same policy to protesters on the other side.

At the best of times, “hate” and “harassment” are slippery and subjective terms. But in this moment, we are facing and must name a fundamental disagreement over what constitutes hate. Criticism of the policies and actions of the state of Israel, a political entity, are not in and of themselves antisemitic; indeed, countless Jewish Americans and Marylanders are themselves deeply critical. But many powerful institutions and individuals have declared that they are in fact the same thing. These institutions have been deeply involved in trying to direct university responses to pro-Palestinian protest. They have insisted that Jewish students feel inherently threatened by protest critical of Israel and supportive of Palestinians, despite the fact that many Jewish students are *themselves involved in such protest*. And the result has been suppression, often violent, justified in large part by the very kinds of seemingly neutral policies that this bill codifies, despite the fact that suppression has been disproportionately aimed at Muslim, Arab, and Palestinian students. Right now, the Trump administration is trying to deport pro-Palestinian international students—and urging universities to participate in identifying them. We fear that this legislation will embolden those who would support such clearly discriminatory actions.

We respectfully urge the committee to return an unfavorable report on SB847.

