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CAUCUS**

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WRITTEN TESTIMONY

**FAVORABLE**

**Education, Energy and the Environment**

February 5, 2025

**SB 24 - Annotated Code – Terminology –  
Clergy and Churches, Faith Institutions, and Places of Worship**

The Maryland Legislative Jewish Caucus (MLJC), a bipartisan group of Senators and Delegates, **strongly supports SB 24**, which modernizes the terminology in Maryland code to better reflect and respect the diverse reality of contemporary religious life and religious institutions in Maryland.

This legislation directly aligns with the MLJC's core mission to protect and advance civil rights and religious freedom for all. By replacing the term "church" throughout the Maryland code with the more inclusive phrase "faith institutions and places of worship," the legislation ensures that our code more accurately reflects the rich diversity of religious life in the state. The change eliminates any legal ambiguity and ensures that Jewish synagogues, Islamic mosques, Hindu temples, and all other religious institutions receive the same protections and privileges under Maryland law.

Additionally, updating the term "clergyman" to "member of the clergy" is particularly relevant to the Jewish Caucus, as many Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative synagogues are led by women rabbis. This change ensures that all of Maryland's religious leaders, regardless of gender, receive equal legal recognition when performing all aspects of their official duties, including performing marriages and providing pastoral care in hospitals and prisons.

Modernizing these terms signals Maryland's commitment to religious diversity and equal protection. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.