



Testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 287 – *Criminal Law – Interference With Access to or Egress From a Religious Facility – Prohibition*
Judicial Proceedings Committee
January 30, 2025

The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (JCRC) serves as the public affairs and community relations arm of the Jewish community. We represent over 100 Jewish social service agencies, synagogues, and schools throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, equity, and pluralism. We work throughout the region to advocate for our nonprofits that serve the most vulnerable on a non-sectarian basis and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the Jewish community and all Marylanders.

The JCRC supports Senate Bill 287 which prohibits someone from blocking access to or from a religious facility including a place of worship, a cemetery, and a religious school, educational facility or community center. SB 287 also establishes a misdemeanor penalty up to 90 days in jail or a fine up to \$1000 dollars or both. The Bill does not prohibit free speech.

Since its founding in 1938, the JCRC's top priority has been protecting the safety and security of the Jewish Community in our region. To that end we work tirelessly to condemn and combat antisemitism – which is one of the oldest forms of hatred, and in recent times has reached unprecedented and unacceptable levels. According to a new report from the ADL Center on Extremism, hatred toward Jews has not only spiked since the October 7 massacre in Israel, but the level of *violent* antisemitism has yet to return to pre-October levels, indicating a new higher and more dangerous baseline.

Violent, strident antisemitic tactics underscore the importance of Senate Bill 287 to ensure that our community is safe whether it be at synagogue, Hillel on campus, religious school or community center. Since October 7, we have seen protestors across the country aggressively block entrances to Jewish religious facilities instilling fear and intimidation. In the last year, University of Pittsburgh students were attacked on their way to Shabbat services, and outside of a synagogue in Los Angeles, police had to step up patrols when protests turned physical. At the time President Joe Biden condemned the violence and said that intimidating Jewish congregants is dangerous, unconscionable, antisemitic, and un-American.

In our region, the JCRC has been on the frontlines of combatting antisemitism. We will continue to work to ensure not only the safety and security of our community but also the right to religious freedom including access to all our Jewish institutions. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report for Senate Bill 287.

