



**SENATE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE**

**FEBRUARY 26, 2025**

**SENATE BILL 709**

**CRIMINAL LAW - MASKED INTIMIDATION - PROHIBITION (UNMASK HATE ACT)**

**FAVORABLE**

Agudath Israel of Maryland, the Mid-Atlantic regional office of Agudath Israel of America – a renowned national Jewish advocacy organization with chapters across the country - speaks on behalf of the Orthodox Jewish communities across Maryland and on the behalf of the many (+60) Orthodox synagogues within our state, as well as the many other religious facilities utilized by our faith community. We stand today in support of Senate Bill 709.

SB 709 would make it a criminal offense to intentionally harass, intimidate, or threaten another person while concealing one's face and with the intent to cause fear of physical harm. This bill addresses a critical issue of public safety, ensuring that individuals who engage in harmful behavior cannot use anonymity to avoid responsibility. The act of concealing one's face to harass and threaten others is a tactic often used to create fear and avoid accountability. Importantly, the bill also recognizes legitimate uses of face coverings and provides affirmative defenses to ensure that the law remains balanced and is not used to prosecute innocent usages.

Famously, this masking tactic was utilized by the Ku Klux Klan in its attempts to stoke racial hatred and prevent the emergence of civil rights for all Americans, regardless of skin color. Face masking is used today, not only by white supremacist groups, but also by antisemitic groups who attempt to intimidate and harass Jewish communities.

Those whose hate brings them to attempt to cowardly intimidate and threaten others should not be allowed to hide behind masks in order to create an atmosphere of fear and danger. We respectfully ask that you issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 709.

Thank you.