



January 30 2025

SB 287 - FWA

Criminal Law - Interference With Access to or Egress From a Religious Facility - Prohibition

Dear Chair William C. Smith Jr, Vice-Chair Jeff Waldstreicher, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

This bill establishes a misdemeanor to discourage deliberate interference with access to religious facilities. However, this is not a problem unique to religious facilities. Blocking access to secular facilities similarly interferes with the free exercise of people to participate in non-religious activities at non-religious facilities. There is no reasonable justification to limit this protection only to places of worship, religious schools, religious educational facilities, and religious community centers. The right to protest does not entail a right to deliberately block others from proceeding with their preferred life activities at either religious or secular facilities. Secular Maryland advocates for providing the same legal protections for all citizen use of all functionally similar facilities. Accordingly, we request that this bill be amended to provide the same legal protections for all otherwise similar facilities, both secular and religious, by extending coverage to all non-profit facilities (instead of only places of worship), all schools, all educational facilities, and all community centers.

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