



Committee: Judicial Proceedings
Testimony: SB 287-Criminal Law-Interference With Access to or Egress from a Religious Facility-Prohibition
Organization: Jewish Community Relations Council of Howard County, MD
Submitting: Kelli Rives
Position: FAVORABLE
Hearing Date: January 30, 2025

Dear Chair Smith and Committee Members:

The Jewish Community Relations Council of Howard County is submitting this testimony in favor of SB 287 which prohibits a person from intentionally physically preventing or hindering someone from entering or leaving a house of worship, religious school, or cemetery.

This law is vitally important to us as Jews since there has been an unprecedented rise in antisemitism since October 7, 2023 across the country and here in Maryland. The Anti-Defamation League reports a 211% increase in reported antisemitic incidents in its most recent year to year statistics here in Maryland.

We are also seeing increasing numbers of protests since October 2023. Many of those protests are outside of our synagogues and mosques and other religious institutions.

SB 287 would protect the right to worship of all Marylanders by allowing unrestricted access to synagogues, mosques, churches and religious schools without interfering with free speech. The bill specifically states that it does not prohibit speech. We respect the rights of all to express their opinions and to engage in vigorous debate. However, when free speech turns into actions that intimidate by detaining or preventing Jews from entering or leaving their synagogues and schools, it is no longer considered "speech" and is not acceptable.

The Department of Justice documents reported hate crimes in Maryland and their latest statistics show that hate crimes in Maryland based on religion increased from 14 to 57 between 2021 and 2023. This is a disturbing trend and passing SB 287 is a commonsense way to help combat religious based violence and hate incidents in our state It will give law enforcement another tool to protect all who worship in Maryland.

We urge the Committee to give a favorable report.