



**Testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 709 –
Criminal Law – Masked Intimidation – Prohibition
(Unmask Hate Act)
Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 26, 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 organizations and synagogues throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, and pluralism. We work throughout the region to advocate for our agencies that serve the most vulnerable residents and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the Jewish community and all Marylanders.

Senate Bill 709, also known as the *Unmask Hate Act*, prohibits a person from intentionally harassing, intimidating, or threatening another person while hiding or concealing their face. The Bill states that anyone who violates this Act is guilty of a misdemeanor, and if convicted, faces up to 90 days in jail and/or a fine of up to \$500 for a first offense, and for subsequent offenses up to 180 days and/or a fine up to \$1,000.

Since the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack in Israel, masked protestors have intimidated Jewish students on college campuses, people attending pro-Israel rallies, and congregants walking to synagogue. The JCRC understands the need to safeguard free speech, however, the presence of masked protestors can be frightening and has at times turned violent, crossing the line of peaceful protest as protected by the First Amendment.

This Bill specifically outlines exemptions where masks can be worn – for religious, health, or professional reasons. Nonetheless, intentionally targeting an individual or group of people while concealing one's identity is unacceptable behavior that cannot continue unchecked. According to the ADL, antisemitism has reached unprecedented levels, and in Maryland, the number of antisemitic incidents skyrocketed in 2023, up 211% from the previous year. SB 709 is one measure we can implement to help combat this scourge of antisemitism and secure the safety and well-being of the Jewish community. For these reasons, we ask for a favorable report on SB 709.

