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Written Testimony
Senate Bill 709 - Criminal Law - Masked Intimidation - Prohibition
(Unmask Hate Act)
Judicial Proceedings Committee – February 26, 2025
Support

Background: Senate Bill 709 would prohibit a person from intentionally harassing, intimidating, or threatening another person while hiding or concealing their face and provide that a person who violates the Act is guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction is subject to imprisonment of up to 90 days or a fine of up to \$500 or both for a first offense, and for subsequent offenses, imprisonment of up to 180 days and a fine not to exceed \$1,000 or both.

Written Comments: Since the start of the KKK and White Supremacist movements, known tactics used by these groups include wearing masks, face coverings, and hoods to harass and intimidate without accountability. This form of threatening behavior must be left in the past. This includes similar practices by some anti-Israel groups, whose members rely on anonymity to engage in masked harassment and intimidation.

Over the past several months, many masked protestors have purposefully used face coverings to conceal their identities while they cross the line into harassment, destruction and violence—allowing them to target Jews and other vulnerable communities without being identified.

With the resurgence of masked harassment in a post-pandemic world, including by anti-Israel groups that use anonymity to target and intimidate, it's crucial to restore and strengthen these measures to protect vulnerable communities, while allowing exceptions for health considerations and religious expression.

For these reasons, the Baltimore Jewish Councils asks for a favorable report on SB709.

The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of The Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.