



**Maryland General Assembly
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
January 30, 2025**

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ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) is pleased to submit this written testimony in strong support of SB287, “Criminal Law – Interference With Access to or Egress From a Religious Facility – Prohibition.” We urge the committee to advance this bill to uphold the sanctity and security of religious freedom across Maryland for all communities.

As the leading anti-hate organization in the world, founded in 1913, ADL's mission remains to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all. Today, we persist in tackling all forms of antisemitism and bias, leveraging innovation and partnerships to drive effective change. We work vigilantly to protect democracy and foster a just and inclusive society for everyone.

There is an urgent need for measures like SB287. ADL's most recent Audit of Antisemitic Incidents tracked 8,873 antisemitic incidents across the country in 2023, representing a 140% increase over the year before. This reflects, by far, the highest number ADL has recorded since we began tracking in 1979. In Maryland specifically, the year 2023 saw 339 antisemitic incidents, marking a 211% increase from 109 incidents in 2022, and a staggering 516% increase from 55 incidents in 2021. This includes 39 incidents at Jewish institutions or schools, representing a 95% rise from the previous year.

Faith communities across the nation are encountering increasing levels of hate-based incidents, according to the latest data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The 2023 FBI report reveals that reported faith-based hate incidents surged from 2,042 incidents in 2022 to 2,699 incidents in 2023, impacting all faith communities. In Maryland, religion-based hate incidents also saw a significant rise, with 316 incidents reported in 2023, up from 105 in 2022, according to the Maryland Department of State Police's 2023 Hate Bias Report. And nationwide there have been instances where individuals of faith have felt afraid to attend houses of worship, amplifying the urgency for legal protections like those proposed in HB305/SB287.

The rise in antisemitism has tangible impacts on Jewish communities across the nation. American Jews are increasingly living in fear of violent attacks, being targeted by conspiracy theories drawing on historical antisemitic tropes, and suffering marginalization due to expressions of anti-Israel animus that frequently cross the line into antisemitism. Similar incidents have been reported in various regions, demonstrating that the threat to religious freedom and safety is not isolated to Maryland but is a widespread issue necessitating immediate legislative intervention.

The proposed legislation provides crucial legal measures to ensure that individuals can access and exit religious facilities without fear of physical interference, thereby safeguarding the

fundamental right to religious freedom. With the passage of SB287, Maryland will send the clear message that it prioritizes and respects the security and safety of its diverse faith communities and that intentional physical obstruction of access to places of worship will not be tolerated.

Thank you for considering ADL's position on this crucial legislation and working to affirm the state's commitment to protecting religious freedoms and upholding the rights of all to freely access places of worship.

**We urge the Judicial Proceedings Committee to give
Senate Bill 287 a favorable report.**