

## **SB287 FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Christopher West

Position: FAV



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

January 30, 2025

The Maryland State Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.  
2 East Miller Senate Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Re: Senate Bill 287: *Criminal Law - Interference With Access to or Egress From a Religious Facility - Prohibition***

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee,

A sad reality of our time is that there has been an uptick in anti-religious extremism, regardless of faith. I believe this Committee and those watching this hearing would agree that Marylanders should not have to fear for their safety or property whenever they go to worship. They should have free and safe access to their chosen religious facilities. At the same time, religious facilities should have the right to exclude from their premises people who are regarded as threats.

Senate Bill 287 simply adopts the same prohibitions and punishments the State has for preventing access or egress for a medical facility (as defined in Section 10-204 of the Criminal Law Article) to religious facilities. The bill defines religious facilities as a place of worship, a cemetery, religious school, educational or community facility, and the grounds adjacent to them.

The operative language of SB 287 states that a person may not intentionally act, alone or with others, to prevent another person from entering or exiting a religious facility by physically detaining the other or obstructing, impeding or hindering the other's passage. The bill explicitly excludes the CEO of the religious facility or the CEO's designee or an agent of the religious facility or a law enforcement officer.

Anyone who violates the law will be guilty of a misdemeanor and fined up to \$1,000.

I appreciate the Committee's consideration of Senate Bill 287 and will be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.

## **SB 287 - FINAL Criminal Law - Interference With Ac**

Uploaded by: deborah miller

Position: FAV



**Testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 287 – *Criminal Law – Interference With Access to or Egress From a Religious Facility – Prohibition***  
**Judicial Proceedings Committee**  
**January 30, 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 social service agencies, synagogues, and schools throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, equity, and pluralism. We work throughout the region to advocate for our nonprofits that serve the most vulnerable on a non-sectarian basis and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the Jewish community and all Marylanders.

The JCRC supports Senate Bill 287 which prohibits someone from blocking access to or from a religious facility including a place of worship, a cemetery, and a religious school, educational facility or community center. SB 287 also establishes a misdemeanor penalty up to 90 days in jail or a fine up to \$1000 dollars or both. The Bill does not prohibit free speech.

Since its founding in 1938, the JCRC's top priority has been protecting the safety and security of the Jewish Community in our region. To that end we work tirelessly to condemn and combat antisemitism – which is one of the oldest forms of hatred, and in recent times has reached unprecedented and unacceptable levels. According to a new report from the ADL Center on Extremism, hatred toward Jews has not only spiked since the October 7 massacre in Israel, but the level of *violent* antisemitism has yet to return to pre-October levels, indicating a new higher and more dangerous baseline.

Violent, strident antisemitic tactics underscore the importance of Senate Bill 287 to ensure that our community is safe whether it be at synagogue, Hillel on campus, religious school or community center. Since October 7, we have seen protestors across the country aggressively block entrances to Jewish religious facilities instilling fear and intimidation. In the last year, University of Pittsburgh students were attacked on their way to Shabbat services, and outside of a synagogue in Los Angeles, police had to step up patrols when protests turned physical. At the time President Joe Biden condemned the violence and said that intimidating Jewish congregants is dangerous, unconscionable, antisemitic, and un-American.

In our region, the JCRC has been on the frontlines of combatting antisemitism. We will continue to work to ensure not only the safety and security of our community but also the right to religious freedom including access to all our Jewish institutions. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report for Senate Bill 287.



## **SB287 JCRC Facility Access FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Kelli Rives

Position: FAV



**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.

## **SB287 Written Testimony - buffer zones.pdf**

Uploaded by: Meredith Weisel

Position: FAV



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

Testimony of Meredith R. Weisel  
ADL Washington D.C. Regional Director

**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.**

## **SB 287 - MSAA Favorable.pdf**

Uploaded by: Patrick Gilbert

Position: FAV



## Maryland State's Attorneys' Association

3300 North Ridge Road, Suite 185

Ellicott City, Maryland 21043

410-203-9881

FAX 410-203-9891

Rich Gibson  
President

Steven I. Kroll  
Coordinator

**DATE:**                    **January 28, 2025**

**BILL NUMBER:**    **SB 287**

**POSITION:**           **Favorable**

The Maryland State's Attorneys' Association (MSAA) supports Senate Bill 287 and urges this Committee to issue a favorable report.

The right to freely practice one's religion is a right not only enshrined in our Constitution but woven into the shared cultural fabric of our nation. Marylanders should have confidence that their right to attend religious services will be protected and defended at every level of government.

SB 287 gives prosecutors the tools to hold accountable those that would target religious communities and obstruct individuals seeking to attend a religious service. Modeled after similar laws that have successfully protected access to medical facilities, this bill establishes reasonable sanctions for impeding access to or egress from a religious facility, telegraphing the seriousness with which the State of Maryland takes this conduct.

Importantly, this bill establishes protections for religious communities in a way that respects other important, and constitutionally protected, activity, striking an appropriate balance in a way that will survive constitutional scrutiny. Because this bill provides necessary protections for individuals exercising their religious freedom and ensures that faith communities can continue to gather without fear, MSAA urges a favorable report.

# **BJC Support SB287.pdf**

Uploaded by: Sarah Miicke

Position: FAV



**Baltimore Jewish Council**

*An agency of The Associated*

#### OFFICERS

ROBIN WEIMAN  
President

RICHARD GRATZ

SARAH GROSSMAN

AMALIA HONICK

RABBI STEVEN SCHWARTZ

RABBI JONATHAN SEIDEMANN

MELANIE SHAPIRO

ELIZABETH GREEN  
Past President

HOWARD LIBIT  
Executive Director

#### MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Adat Chaim Congregation  
American Jewish Committee  
Americans for Peace Now  
Baltimore Chapter  
American Israel Public Affairs Committee  
American Red Magen David for Israel  
American Zionist Movement  
Amit Women  
Association of Reform Zionists of America  
Baltimore Board of Rabbis  
Baltimore Hebrew Congregation  
Baltimore Jewish Green and Just Alliance  
Baltimore Men's ORT  
Baltimore Zionist District  
Beth Am Congregation  
Beth El Congregation  
Beth Israel Congregation  
Beth Shalom Congregation of  
Howard County  
Beth Tfiloh Congregation  
Bnai Brith, Chesapeake Bay Region  
Bnai Israel Congregation  
Bnai Jacob Shaarei Zion Congregation  
Bolton Street Synagogue  
Chevra Ahavas Chesed, Inc.  
Chevrei Tzedek Congregation  
Chizuk Amuno Congregation  
Congregation Beir Tikvah  
Congregation Tiferes Yisroel  
Federation of Jewish Women's  
Organizations of Maryland  
Hadassah  
Har Sinai - Oheb Shalom Congregation  
J Street  
Jewish Federation of Howard County  
Jewish Labor Committee  
Jewish War Veterans  
Jewish War Veterans, Ladies Auxiliary  
Jewish Women International  
Jews For Judaism  
Moses Montefiore Anshe Emunah  
Hebrew Congregation  
National Council of Jewish Women  
Ner Tamid Congregation  
Rabbinical Council of America  
Religious Zionists of America  
Shaarei Tfiloh Congregation  
Shomrei Emunah Congregation  
Suburban Orthodox Congregation  
Temple Beth Shalom  
Temple Isaiah  
Zionist Organization of America  
Baltimore District

## WRITTEN TESTIMONY

### **Senate Bill 287- Criminal Law - Interference with Access to or Egress From a Religious Facility – Prohibition.**

#### **Judiciary Committee**

**January 30, 2025**

#### **Support**

**Background:** Modeled after legislation preventing the blocking of access to medical facilities, this legislation would establish a misdemeanor penalty for those who block access to the entrance of religious facilities. Religious facilities include places of worship, a cemetery, a religious school, educational facility, community center and the grounds adjacent to them.

**Written Comments:** The Baltimore Jewish Council (BJC) represents the Associated Jewish Federation of Baltimore and all its agencies, and programs, as well as the organized Jewish Community of Baltimore. As incidents of protest increase across the country, it is important that access to religious facilities remains a priority and that people feel safe entering them. We have seen students at Hillel's on college campuses and community members at their local synagogues feel intimidated and fearful of entering these facilities because protestors have blocked the entrances. This behavior is unacceptable, and access should be safeguarded by the state.

**For these reasons, we ask for a favorable report on SB287.**

*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.*

# **MD Catholic Conference\_SB 287\_FWA.pdf**

Uploaded by: Garrett O'Day

Position: FWA



**January 30, 2025**

**SB 287**

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

**Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee**

**Position: FAVORABLE w/Amendment**

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 287 with amendments. The Catholic Conference represents the public policy interests of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, including the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington and the Diocese of Wilmington, which together encompass over one million Marylanders.

This legislation would make it illegal for any person or group to prevent another from entering or exiting a “religious facility”. Religious facilities would include any place of worship, cemetery, or any faith-based educational facility or community center.

This legislation aims to ensure that no person is prevented from peaceable ingress and egress into a religious facility. Where such disruption is attempted, it is often times born out of a disagreement with or protest to one’s faith tradition or beliefs and/or the activities associated therewith. Pope Francis has stated that the “problem of intolerance must be confronted in all its forms” and that where persons are “persecuted and marginalized because of [their] religious convictions or ethnic identity, the wellbeing of society as a whole is endangered and each one of us must feel affected.” (Pope Francis, *Address to a Delegation from the Simon Wiesenthal Center*, 2013)

The freedom to peacefully worship has been a seminal part of the history of our great state and a value Marylanders have prioritized for centuries. Likewise, we believe the purpose of this bill to be aligned with that continuing tradition and priority. However, we do believe there to be some hypothetical limitations in the exceptions provided for in this legislation and offer some small amendments to Senate Bill 287, attached hereto.

We thank the sponsors of this bill for their steadfast commitment to upholding religious liberty in Maryland. We urge this committee to accept the proposed amendments to Senate Bill 287 prior to passage of this well-intentioned legislation. Thank you for your consideration.

## **Amendments to Senate Bill 287**

### **Amendment No. 1**

On page 3, line 6, strike “CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER” and insert “PERSON IN CHARGE”

### **Amendment No. 2**

On page 3, line 8, strike “CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER” and insert “PERSON IN CHARGE”

### **Amendment No. 3**

On page 3, line 10, after “FACILITY”, insert “OR OTHER PERSON AUTHORIZED BY THE RELIGIOUS FACILITY, OR OTHERWISE ACTING IN GOOD FAITH ON ITS BEHALF TO PROTECT THE RELIGIOUS FACILITY OR ITS ACTIVITIES”

### **Amendment No. 4**

On page 3, line 13, insert “(3) A RELIGIOUS FACILITY RETAINS THE SOLE DISCRETION TO DETERMINE WHO MAY BE ON ITS PREMISES, AS DETERMINED BY THE INTERNAL DICTATES OF THAT RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION.”

# **SB0287\_FWA\_mgoldstein 2025.pdf**

Uploaded by: Mathew Goldstein

Position: FWA



---

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.

Mathew Goldstein  
3838 Early Glow Ln  
Bowie, MD

## **Agudah Testimony - SB287 - INTERFERENCE W EGRESS R**

Uploaded by: Rabbi Ariel Sadwin

Position: FWA



**SENATE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE**

**JANUARY 30, 2025**

**SENATE BILL 287**

**CRIMINAL LAW - INTERFERENCE WITH ACCESS TO OR EGRESS FROM A RELIGIOUS  
FACILITY - PROHIBITION**

**FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT**

Agudath Israel of Maryland, the Mid-Atlantic regional office of Agudath Israel of America – a renowned national Jewish advocacy organization with chapters across the country - speaks on behalf of the Orthodox Jewish communities across Maryland and on the behalf of the many (+60) Orthodox synagogues within our state, as well as the many other religious facilities utilized by our faith community. We stand today in support of Senate Bill 287, with amendments.

SB 287 would prohibit a person or persons from impeding others from entering or exiting a religious facility, including places of worship, cemeteries, and religious educational facilities. The need to ensure that people of faith are able to worship without fear and without harassment is clear. In recent years, members of the Jewish faith have seen politically-motivated and antisemitic protesters target synagogues, barring people from being able to safely enter and exit as well as creating an atmosphere of intimidation and fear. While freedom of speech allows for peaceful protests regardless of ideological content, there is no right to impede others from utilizing places of worship.

In order to best advance the goals of this bill, we urge slightly amending the bill to ensure that religious facilities retain their ability to regulate activity within their grounds while protecting the rights of worshippers. We trust that the amendments below preserve the intent and aims of SB 287, and thus respectfully ask that you issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 287, as amended.

Thank you.

## **Amendments to Senate Bill 287**

### **Amendment No. 1**

On page 3, line 6, strike “CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER” and insert “PERSON IN CHARGE”

### **Amendment No. 2**

On page 3, line 8, strike “CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER” and insert “PERSON IN CHARGE”

### **Amendment No. 3**

On page 3, line 10, after “FACILITY”, insert “OR OTHER PERSON AUTHORIZED BY THE RELIGIOUS FACILITY, OR OTHERWISE ACTING IN GOOD FAITH ON ITS BEHALF TO PROTECT THE RELIGIOUS FACILITY OR ITS ACTIVITIES”

### **Amendment No. 4**

On page 3, line 13, insert “(3) A RELIGIOUS FACILITY RETAINS THE SOLE DISCRETION TO DETERMINE WHO MAY BE ON ITS PREMISES, AS DETERMINED BY THE INTERNAL DICTATES OF THAT RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION.”

## **sb 287 church access.pdf**

Uploaded by: Ken Phelps Jr

Position: UNF



**TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO SB 0287:**

**\*\*UNFAVORABLE\*\***

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

**TO:** Senator William C. Smith, Chair, Senator Jeff Waldstreicher, Vice Chair and the members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

**FROM:** Rev. Linda K. Boyd, Co-Chair, Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network, Diocese of Maryland

**DATE:** January 30, 2025

At its national convention in 2018, the Episcopal Church adopted Resolution No. 2018-C009, entitled, “Urge Church to Become a Sanctuary in Support of Immigrants” and stated the following:

*Resolved, That the 79th General Convention of The Episcopal Church, in obedience to the many biblical injunctions imploring us not to wrong or oppress the alien in our midst and Jesus' own mandate to extend care for the stranger, and in accordance with our Baptismal Covenant, reaffirms resolution 2015-D057 supporting the New Sanctuary Movement; and be it further*

*Resolved, That The Episcopal Church urge its members, as people of faith and people of conscience, pledge to challenge and question any unjust immigration law, policy, or practice that is inconsistent with our biblical mandate to "not wrong or oppress a resident alien" (Exodus 22:21); and be it further*

*Resolved, That The Episcopal Church recommend that its institutions and congregations become places of welcome, refuge, healing, and other forms of material and pastoral support for those targeted for deportation due to immigration status or some perceived status of difference, and that we work alongside our friends, families, and neighbors to ensure the dignity and human rights of all people; and be it further*



***Resolved, That The Episcopal Church encourage its members to connect with local and national sanctuary communities and institutions, faith-based coalitions, and immigrant rights groups and coalitions, and engage in educating, organizing, advocacy, and direct action, and other methods as deemed appropriate in each context, to ensure the safety, security, and due process for immigrants, with a focus on keeping families together of the undocumented community, and to assist in equipping congregations, clergy and lay leaders to engage in such work, appropriate to local contexts, capacity, and discernment; and be it further***

***Resolved, That The Episcopal Church affirm our church's support for U.S. executive policies that deemphasize immigrant enforcement action against those who have not committed felony crimes, and reaffirm our church's support for congressional action for comprehensive and just reform of the broken U.S. immigration system as called for in General Convention resolution 2009-B006: "to allow undocumented immigrants who have established roots in the United States and are often parents and spouses of U.S. Citizens to have a pathway to legalization and to full social and economic integration in to the United States."***

**Following this Resolution, the Episcopal Church of Maryland respectfully requests an unfavorable report.**