

HB0305_RichardKaplowitz_FAV
02/11/2025
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Frederick, MD 21703-7134

TESTIMONY ON HB#0305 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Criminal Law - Interference With Access to or Egress From a Religious Facility – Prohibition

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and members of the Judiciary Committee
FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of/ HB#/0305, Criminal Law - Interference With Access to or Egress From a Religious Facility – Prohibition

In the three months since the Oct. 7 massacre in Israel, U.S. antisemitic incidents have skyrocketed, reaching a total of 3,291* incidents between Oct. 7, 2023, and Jan. 7, 2024, according to ADL's (the Anti-Defamation League) preliminary data. This represents a 361-percent increase compared to the same period one year prior, which saw 712 incidents. The preliminary three-month tally is higher than the total number of antisemitic incidents tracked in any year in the last decade, except for calendar year 2022, when the total number of incidents reached a historic high of 3,697. Since Oct. 7, there was an average of nearly 34 antisemitic incidents per day, putting 2023 on track to be the highest year for antisemitic acts against Jews since ADL started tracking this data in the late 1970s.

“The American Jewish community is facing a threat level that’s now unprecedented in modern history,” said Jonathan Greenblatt, ADL CEO. “It’s shocking that we’ve recorded more antisemitic acts in three months than we usually would in an entire year.”

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Given the rise of antisemitism and other forms of religious hate, we need to ensure that religious facilities remain accessible to their members and lawful visitors. As incidents of protest increase across the country, it is important that religious facility access remains a priority, and that people feel safe entering them. We have seen students at Hillels 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.

This bill would make it a criminal offense for these actions denying access to a religious facility by prohibiting a person, acting alone or with others, from preventing another from entering or exiting a religious facility. This is not applicable just to synagogues but to houses of faith such as churches and mosques, among others. It will accomplish that goal by establishing that a violation of the Act is a misdemeanor with a penalty of imprisonment not exceeding 90 days or a fine not exceeding \$1,000 or both on conviction.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB0305.

¹ <https://www.adl.org/resources/press-release/us-antisemitic-incidents-skyrocketed-360-aftermath-attack-israel-according>