



In Support of HB 1452

Hate Crimes and Hate Bias - Definitions of Sexual Orientation and Hate Bias Incident House Judiciary Committee

March 11, 2025

Testimony of Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, Co-Founder, Mizrahi Family Charitable Fund

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, and I submit this testimony in strong support of House Bill 1452. My family is Jewish, and my father was fortunate to escape the Nazis at age 7. But most of our family was murdered—simply because of who they were: Jews. The Nazis also targeted LGBTQ individuals, people with disabilities, and many others in their campaign of hate.

I wish hate was merely a dark chapter relegated to history. But it persists today, sometimes fueled by individuals in positions of power and influence. Right now, people in the LGBTQ community seem to have targets on their backs. That is why **HB 1452 is essential. This bill strengthens Maryland's ability to track and therefore combat hate crimes and bias incidents, ensuring more affected communities receive the protection they deserve.** Indeed, whether we know it or not, everyone has someone they care about who could be at risk to hate crimes.

From one member of my family:

"I am a Lesbian woman in my 60's, and I treasure the freedom to walk openly with my female spouse of 39 years without fear of harassment or violence. Younger people than me have enjoyed even more freedom to identify themselves with variations of gender identity and sexual orientation, and I believe that has made a healthier society for all. Enshrining protections is important, and would be difficult to monitor or enforce without the tracking made better when HB 1452 passes. This bill will make harassment and crimes against a large group of people visible; no one deserves to be invisible on the basis of their identity. People deserve protection if they are targeted in hate actions and hate crimes. I support HB 1452."

From a young adult member of our family:

"One year ago, my partner and I moved back to the Chicago metropolitan area from a highly conservative town in Hartford County. In that town, people repeatedly shouted slurs at, stared at, and—on one occasion—threw rocks at my partner, who is openly queer. Outside the local church, which happened to have a gay pastor, we witnessed weekly protests featuring signs with similarly aggressive language.

Chicago, a city known for its openness toward the LGBTQ community, represented a safe haven where we wouldn't have to fear for our safety or that of our community. When looking for a place to live, social acceptance is undoubtedly a factor. Not only does it indicate a potential refuge, but it also reflects an established culture of respect, diversity, and inclusivity.

When a state's jurisdiction fails to protect one community, it raises concerns about the treatment of others. If the LGBTQ community is not receiving adequate protections, how are women, people of color, or religious minorities being safeguarded?

Specificity in defining "hate bias incidents" allows for the accurate collection of data within the legal system. Harmful biases precede violence, so identifying and documenting them can help prevent negative trends from escalating. This level of proactive protection is precisely what I wish had been in place when I was living in Connecticut—and it is something I will always consider when choosing where to live."

Strengthening Protections for Vulnerable Communities

HB 1452 makes critical updates to Maryland's legal framework by refining the definitions of "sexual orientation" and "hate bias incidents." These changes will improve data collection, enhance legal clarity, and help law enforcement and policymakers address hate-based threats more effectively.

Updating the Definition of Sexual Orientation

The bill expands protections by recognizing that individuals can be targeted based on both their actual and perceived sexual orientation. This is crucial because many acts of hate stem from mistaken assumptions about a person's identity. By explicitly distinguishing sexual orientation from gender identity, HB 1452 also provides greater legal clarity, reinforcing that both categories are protected under Maryland law.

Defining Hate Bias Incidents

HB 1452 introduces a clear definition of "hate bias incidents" as acts of hostility or aggression directed at individuals, groups, or property based on their real or perceived protected status. Many such incidents do not meet the legal threshold for a crime, yet they contribute to a climate of fear, intimidation, and discrimination. By tracking these incidents, Maryland will be better equipped to identify patterns of bias and take proactive steps to prevent escalation into violence.

Why This Matters

Hate crimes and bias-motivated incidents inflict deep harm—not only on individuals but on entire communities. As someone who has worked extensively to combat discrimination, I have seen firsthand how gaps in data and legal clarity allow hate to fester. Maryland has made progress, but we must do more.

By ensuring that law enforcement can document and address both hate crimes and non-criminal bias incidents, this bill equips our state with the tools needed to protect vulnerable communities. Additionally, improved data collection will help policymakers, law enforcement, and community organizations develop more effective prevention and response strategies.

Conclusion

HB 1452 is a common-sense, necessary step in our fight against hate. I thank Del Vogel for bringing this to our state. By refining definitions and improving data collection, Maryland will be better prepared to combat bias, protect vulnerable communities, and promote justice.

I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on HB 1452. Thank you for your time and consideration.