



February 11, 2025

HB 305

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

House Judiciary Committee

Position: FAVORABLE w/Amendment

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 305 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 House Bill 305, 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 House Bill 305 prior to passage of this well-intentioned legislation. Thank you for your consideration.

Amendments to House Bill 305

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.”