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House Bill 1308 - Crime of Violence - Medical Facilities and Places of Worship - Penalty (Sacred Places Safety Act) Judiciary Committee – March 11, 2025 Favorable With Amendments

Background: House Bill 1308 would create a felony for a person committing a crime of violence while the person is in a medical facility or a place of worship as defined by this bill, in addition to any other penalty imposed for the underlying crime.

Written Comments: The Baltimore Jewish Council represents The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore and all of its agencies and the organized Jewish community in Greater Baltimore, including places of worship.

While we appreciate the sponsor's intention with this bill and believe that those who commit crimes of violence in sacred spaces should be held accountable, we would like to bring to the attention of the committee that the definition of "Places of Worship" is not inclusive of our all our community places of worship. To be specific, the bill as drafted defines "Places of Worship" as follows:

"PLACE OF WORSHIP" MEANS A NONRESIDENTIAL LOCATION WHERE MORE THAN ONE INDIVIDUAL ASSEMBLES FOR PURPOSES OF RELIGIOUS OR SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCE.

Several small congregations are places of worship within the home of the Rabbi and their family, with the living room being used as the "synagogue" for the community. These can be found across the country. Many of these are Chabad Houses and are located around college campuses to help students feel connected to their Judaism while away from home. These locations are representative of "seeking Judaism wherever you are." For example, [The Rohr Chabad Jewish Center at Towson and Goucher](#) is available for students at both colleges in the home of Rabbi Mendy Rivkin and his wife, Sheiny. There are currently over [40 Chabad Houses across the State of Maryland](#).

To ensure that "Places of Worship" is comprehensive, we ask that the definition be amended so that congregations such as Chabad Houses would be included under the bill. This could be through striking the word "nonresidential," however the Committee may see fit another way to better address this exclusionary language. **For these reasons, the Baltimore Jewish Councils asks for these amendments to be considered on HB1308.**

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.