



Testimony in SUPPORT of *House Bill 324 – County Boards of Education – Antibias Training for Members – Requirement (County Board Member Antibias Training Act)*
Ways and Means Committee
January 29, 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 House Bill 324 which requires each member of a county board of education to complete antibias training at least once during a member's term. This Bill comes on the heels of the Maryland General Assembly's passage last year of legislation requiring all school employees to undergo biennial antibias training, including an understanding of implicit bias, antisemitism, Islamophobia and other forms of hatred against marginalized communities. HB 324 closes the loophole which did *not* include Board of Education members. It also specifies that the training will be performed separately from that of other school employees.

The JCRC runs a robust education outreach and programming department. Its mission is to combat school-based antisemitism; advocate on behalf of Jewish students, families, and employees; and promote safe, hate-free, respectful learning environments for all students. In Montgomery County, the JCRC is also deeply engaged in addressing all forms of academic inequity. We have strongly supported MCPS' anti-racist audit, we are a proud member of the Black and Brown Coalition for Educational Equity and Excellence, and we also work closely with Identity to support MCPS' Latino youth. The JCRC works tirelessly on a grassroots level to help educate school staff about what antisemitism is and how we can work together to address it in our schools. We know first-hand that there is a lack of understanding about what exactly antisemitism is, which leads to it being treated differently from other forms of hatred.

Dramatic spikes in antisemitism over the last several years have been well-documented and show no signs of abating. Immediately following Hamas' brutal October 7, 2023, antisemitism skyrocketed across the United States. Nationally there was a 300% increase in antisemitic incidents. And in our region, the JCRC has been on the frontlines of this crisis, responding to over 150 incidents in the 9 months following October 7th, a majority of them in Montgomery County Public Schools. These incidents have run the gamut from property vandalism to hate-

based bullying and more. Six schools with significant numbers of Jewish students and faculty, some located mere blocks from synagogues, were targeted with hateful graffiti.

School personnel often have limited familiarity with antisemitism and little cultural competency about Jewish ethnicity, Jewish practice, and the critical importance of Israel to the Jewish identities of an overwhelming majority of American Jews. To address this gap, the JCRC has developed an ever-expanding roster of teacher training opportunities for educators. Most critically, we have partnered with the ADL's DC regional office to develop a comprehensive 3-hour training on antisemitism, anti-Zionism, and Jewish identity that has been presented to over 1,400 MCPS personnel. The JCRC strongly believes that school employees should have a baseline competency in the forms of hatred that are significantly manifesting in our schools at this time, both those that are religiously based - antisemitism and Islamophobia - and otherwise. That includes xenophobia, anti-Asian hatred, homophobia, transphobia, and racism. This knowledge can help schools respond swiftly and effectively to hate and bias incidents when they occur.

HB 324 is an expression of our community's commitment to responding forcefully, consistently, and sensitively to a problem that has only continued to worsen over recent months and years, and which undermines the very fabric of our society. It is also a commitment to ensuring that our schools reflect the very best values that we wish to instill in future generations of leaders. For these reasons we urge a favorable report for House Bill 324.