



**Maryland General Assembly
House Ways and Means Committee
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ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) is pleased to submit this testimony in **support of House Bill 0324, County Boards of Education - Antibias Training for Members - Requirement (County Board Member Antibias Training Act)**. This bill builds on the successes of the last session to expand the current antibias training law to now require each member of a county board of education to complete antibias training at least once during their term. It reinforces the importance of equipping decision-makers within our county school boards with tools and knowledge to address the unprecedented levels of hate crimes and bias incidents impacting our faith-based communities.

Since 1913, the mission of ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) has been to “stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” As a leading anti-hate organization, for decades one of the most important ways in which ADL has fought against bigotry and antisemitism has been by investigating extremist threats across the ideological spectrum, producing research to inform the public, and working with law enforcement, educators, the tech industry, and elected leaders to promote best practices to effectively address and counter these threats. Further, ADL conducts an annual *Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents*, which is widely used by law enforcement, educational institutions, elected officials, and the community at large to understand not only how to respond to antisemitic incidents, but how to create change.

At a time of rising antisemitism across the country, including in the entire state of Maryland, this bill sends a clear message that our community is committed to ensuring that schools have the tools they need to push back against these trends. The need for robust training for our educators and decision-makers in K-12 schools could not be more urgent. When our local education leaders do not understand the history of antisemitism and how it manifests in modern day, or the elements leading to these incidents, they cannot fully grasp the significance of bias and bigotry, or the lasting impact that hateful words and conduct can have on the community at large. **Therefore, this bill is a measure ADL wholeheartedly supports and sees as a critically important step in the right direction.**

In 2023, ADL tabulated 8,873 antisemitic incidents across the United States, representing a 140% increase from the 3,698 incidents recorded in 2022 and marking the highest number on record since ADL began tracking antisemitic incidents in 1979. This dramatic increase reverses trends from the early 2010s, when antisemitic incidents were at some of the lowest levels in the history of the Audit. Since 2014, annual incident totals have risen year-over-year, breaking records in 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022, and now again in 2023. Even before October 7, 2023,

ADL observed significant monthly increases in antisemitic incidents compared to 2022. The previous monthly record of 394 incidents, set in November 2022, was surpassed in February, March, April, May, and September of 2023, with September alone reaching 513 incidents.

In 2023, there were 1,162 antisemitic incidents reported in K-12 schools across the United States, a 135% increase from the 495 incidents recorded in 2022. These incidents included 672 cases of harassment, 464 cases of vandalism, and 26 cases of assault. The 672 cases of harassment represent a staggering 161% increase from 2022, with 154 of these incidents (23%) involving swastikas drawn on classmates' notebooks, classroom chalkboards, and desks. The 464 cases of vandalism reflect a 100% increase from 2022, with swastikas present in 87% of these incidents (402 cases). Graffiti found in schools included hate-filled messages such as "Fuck the Jews Hitler was Right (sic)," "We hate Jews," and "I like what the Nazis Did, I hate Jews."

In Maryland, the surge in antisemitism has been particularly alarming. In 2023, ADL tracked 339 antisemitic incidents statewide, a 211% increase from the 109 incidents reported in 2022 and a 516% increase from the 55 incidents recorded in 2021. Maryland accounted for 4% of all antisemitic incidents nationwide and ranked seventh in the country for the total number of incidents. Among the incidents in Maryland, there were 210 cases of harassment, a 233% increase from 63 in 2022; 124 cases of vandalism, an 188% increase from 43 in 2022; and five assaults, up from three in 2022. **These incidents placed Maryland fourth in the nation for the number of antisemitic incidents at K-12 institutions and 19th for incidents at colleges and universities.**

Given the sharp increase in incidents targeting K-12 schools, this data underscores the urgent need for antibias training for educators and school board members. Given the insidious nature of bullying, compounded by the fact that many children may not feel empowered to report their experiences, it is likely that the actual number of school-based antisemitic incidents was significantly higher than the data reported in the Audit.

These incidents did not take place in a vacuum. They come at a time of rising bigotry, the emboldening of hate groups, and a resurgence of Holocaust denialism—a challenge that has existed on the fringes for many years, but in recent years has encroached on the mainstream of our politics and discourse. When our school employees and education decision-makers and leaders are not prepared to work with students or respond to parents and guardians, it can cause tremendous harm to the school community of those impacted by the hate incidents. Education is therefore key to combating hate in all its forms. By learning about the history of antisemitism, anti-Muslim hate, or other forms of religious discrimination, and how we are seeing it evident today, educators will have the opportunity to explore how stereotypes, prejudice, and religious and ethnic hatred can escalate to atrocity.

ADL has been a long-standing trainer on antisemitism and anti-bias education for schools throughout the entire state. Through initiatives like *No Place for Hate*® (NPFH), ADL partners with many schools to provide a framework designed to engage students and staff in dialogue and active learning on topics such as bias, bullying, inclusion, and allyship, tailored to the needs of each community. Additionally, ADL Education offers free online resources for educators, such as *Antisemitism: What Do Educators Need to Know?*, a self-paced module that introduces educators to Judaism and antisemitism, which has been widely accessed by teachers and administrators across Maryland. For students, the pilot program *Awareness to Action* provides

middle and high schoolers with lessons on the history and impact of antisemitism and how to support their peers as allies. Beyond virtual resources, ADL delivers in-person, facilitated workshops for educators, including *The First Steps to Challenging Antisemitism* and *Educators Challenging Antisemitism*, which introduce participants to the realities of contemporary antisemitism and equip them with tools to address and challenge bias in their schools. Through these comprehensive programs, ADL continues to lead efforts in combatting hate and fostering inclusivity in K-12 education.

Behind every hate crime statistic, there is a person, a family, a community – dealing with the unimaginable. Hate crimes and bias incidents cause a distinct type of harm that can have a lasting, immeasurable impact. This is because they target people due to their protected, immutable characteristics – race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, sex, gender, gender identity, disability – things about a person that are central to identity and cannot be changed. ADL is proud to be the leading anti-hate organization that has been able to help thousands of people who report hate and bias incidents to us.

We feel very strongly that it is imperative to disrupt the cycle of hate with education, starting with those who are leading our school buildings and classrooms. **HB 0324** helps put this conversation front and center and continues the good work that ADL and many others have been focusing on in several area school districts. There is unfortunately no magic wand that we can wave to undo the irreparable harm that hate crimes or bias incidents cause. Yet here in Maryland, we can make sure that our policies are crafted in a way that will help stem the rising tide. We have an important obligation and unique opportunity to empower a new generation to learn from our past to build a safer, stronger, and more equitable society in the future.

**We urge the House Ways and Means Committee to give
House Bill 0324 a favorable report.**