



**Maryland General Assembly
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**

**HB14 – County Boards of Education – Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation –
Information Collection and Reporting Requirements**

Testimony of Tali Cohen
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Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and members of the Committee, my name is Tali Cohen, and I am the Regional Director of the ADL Washington, D.C. region. I appreciate the opportunity to submit this written testimony regarding **HB14**, which would strengthen data collection regarding hate and bias incidents in Maryland’s K-12 schools.

Since its inception in 1913, ADL has had a timeless mission to “stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” Dedicated to combatting antisemitism, prejudice, and bigotry of all kinds, ADL has long been at the forefront of efforts to deter and counter antisemitic incidents.

HB14 has the opportunity to do something simple but essential: it requires schools to identify and track the specific personal identity characteristics that motivate bullying and harassment incidents, and it requires transparency by making that data publicly available. ADL strongly believes that data drives policy; we cannot address what we do not measure.

We strongly supported the original House version of this bill and would like to express some concerns with the amended version before you. The amendments in section (e)(3), which grant county boards excessive discretion in reporting by allowing them to determine whether a particular group has experienced “a substantial increase in incidents” or “a disproportionate incident rate,” incredibly weaken the ultimate goal of protecting students from harassment. Because neither term is defined, we believe these provisions render the reporting requirement unenforceable.

However, with the introduction of amendments by Senator Brooks today, we continue to support HB14 **favorable with amendments**.



According to ADL's 2024 Audit of Antisemitic Incidents, Maryland had the sixth-highest number of antisemitic incidents in the country—356 incidents across the state, with 107 of those occurring in K-12 schools. That's 107 times that Jewish students experienced harassment, vandalism or assault in their schools. And we know from research that many incidents go unreported, meaning the actual number is likely much higher.

These aren't just statistics. They represent students who are taunted with Holocaust jokes, who see swastikas drawn on their notebooks, and who are threatened simply because they are Jewish. Sadly, there are many stories I could share. One example right here at home in Maryland is from March 2024 where three 13-year-old students at Plum Point Middle School in Calvert County were charged with a hate crime after displaying swastikas, making Nazi salutes, and offensive comments to a classmate simply because of the classmate's religious beliefs. Hate and harassment like this can persist in our schools if it is not identified, tracked, and ultimately addressed.

HB14, with language closer to the original bill, will help schools and policymakers understand the scope and nature of bias-motivated bullying. When we track data by the motivating characteristic—whether that is religion, race, national origin or another protected category—we can identify patterns, allocate resources effectively and implement targeted interventions. This is how we move from awareness to action.

Additionally, when county boards post this data publicly, it creates accountability. Parents, educators and community members can see what is happening in their schools and work together to address it. Every student deserves to learn in an environment free from fear and harassment. By passing this bill, Maryland would be taking a critical step towards making that a reality.

Thank you for your time today. We urge the Committee to pass HB14 favorable with amendments.