



HoCo JAG

Howard County Jewish Advocacy Group

HB0661 – FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

Written Testimony: Favorable with Amendments

Hearing Date: March 17, 2026

**Submitted by the Howard County Jewish Advocacy Group
Before the Maryland General Assembly Government, Labor, and Elections Committee**

Dear Chair Wells, Vice-Chair Kerr, and Members of the Committee,

The Howard County Jewish Advocacy Group (HoCoJAG), representing Jewish residents and community members in Howard County, supports the goal of House Bill 661 (HB0661) to recognize the contributions of Muslim Americans and Jewish Americans to the civic and cultural life of Maryland.

Our members strongly support recognizing those contributions. However, several provisions of the bill should be amended to ensure that the legislation relies on reliable demographic data and that these commemorations promote civic unity and mutual respect.

1. Legislative Findings in the Preamble Should Be Accurate

The bill's preamble includes demographic assertions regarding the number of Muslim and Jewish residents of Maryland. These figures do not appear to correspond consistently with commonly cited demographic estimates derived from authoritative research.

Demographic estimates for religious communities are inherently difficult to measure. Because the U.S. Census does not collect data on religious affiliation, estimates must be derived from survey research and demographic modeling, and results can vary depending on methodology and underlying assumptions. When demographic claims are embedded in statutory language, they should rely on clearly verifiable and widely accepted sources.

Recognizing the contributions of Muslim Americans and Jewish Americans to Maryland is entirely appropriate. However, including specific population estimates in legislative findings—particularly where reliable data sources differ—risks creating unnecessary controversy and detracting from the bill's intended purpose.

For example, publicly available research illustrates the range of estimates that can arise from different methodologies. The [Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Study](#) estimates that approximately 4% of adults in Maryland identify as Muslim, which would suggest a

population significantly different from the figure cited in the bill when applied to Maryland's total population. Other demographic compilations likewise produce different estimates depending on the assumptions used ([World Population Review, Muslim Population by State: Maryland](#)).

Because religious affiliation is not measured by the U.S. Census and estimates vary depending on methodology, demographic figures regarding religious populations should generally not be embedded in legislative findings unless they are supported by clear and authoritative sources.

Suggested Amendment

To address this concern, the Committee may wish to amend the preamble to remove the demographic claims regarding both Muslim and Jewish Marylanders.

Proposed language:

“WHEREAS, Muslim Americans and Jewish Americans have made important civic, cultural, educational, and economic contributions to the State of Maryland;”

This change preserves the bill's purpose while avoiding reliance on uncertain demographic estimates and helps ensure that these commemorations remain focused on education, recognition, and mutual respect among Maryland's diverse communities.

2. Commemorative Observances Should Promote Civic Unity

HB0661 encourages educational institutions, government agencies, and community organizations to observe these commemorative months through educational programs and activities. This intent is constructive. However, in the current social climate, it is important that state-recognized commemorations not become platforms for inflaming religious or ethnic tensions.

Maryland has experienced a troubling rise in antisemitic incidents in recent years. According to data available through the [FBI Crime Data Explorer](#) for the recent two-year period, anti-Jewish incidents accounted for approximately 18.4% of all reported hate-bias incidents in Maryland, despite Jews comprising less than 4% of the State's population. By comparison, anti-Black incidents accounted for approximately 32.4% of reported incidents, while Black residents comprise roughly 31.6% of the State's population. These figures illustrate that antisemitism remains a serious and disproportionate concern in Maryland.

Muslim Americans have likewise faced discrimination and bias, and efforts to combat hatred against any community should be supported. For that reason, state-recognized commemorations should emphasize education, cultural recognition, and mutual respect, rather than becoming vehicles for political activism or messaging that could deepen divisions among communities.

Ensuring that commemorative observances are conducted in a manner that promotes understanding and respect would strengthen the bill's goal of celebrating Maryland's diverse communities.

3. Balanced Recognition of Communities

HB0661 commendably recognizes both Muslim Americans and Jewish Americans within the same legislation. This balanced approach reflects Maryland's longstanding commitment to religious pluralism and respect for diverse communities.

Ensuring that these observances remain educational, respectful, and inclusive will reinforce that tradition.

Recommended Amendment to Promote Unity

To ensure that commemorative observances strengthen civic cohesion, the following language could be added to the bill:

Proposed language (new subsection):

“Activities conducted in observance of Muslim American Heritage Month or Jewish American Heritage Month under this section shall promote education, cultural understanding, and mutual respect among the diverse communities of the State and may not be used to promote discrimination, hostility, or hatred toward any group based on religion, ethnicity, race, national origin, or shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics.”

This language would help ensure that these commemorations contribute to the goals of education and civic understanding rather than inadvertently exacerbating social tensions.

Conclusion

HB0661 addresses an important objective: recognizing the contributions of communities that have played meaningful roles in Maryland's civic and cultural life.

HoCoJAG respectfully recommends that the General Assembly:

- Remove unsupported demographic claims regarding Muslim and Jewish Maryland residents.
- Add language ensuring that commemorative observances promote mutual respect and are not used to promote discrimination or hostility toward any community.

With these improvements, HB0661 can more effectively fulfill its purpose of celebrating the diverse communities that contribute to the vitality of the State of Maryland.

For these reasons, HoCoJAG respectfully requests a **favorable report with the amendments described above.**

Respectfully submitted,

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