



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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February 13, 2026

The Honorable Melissa Wells, Chair
Government, Labor, and Elections Committee
145 Lowe House Office Building
142 Lowe House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT of House Bill 0661**: General Provisions - Commemorative Months - Muslim American Heritage and Jewish American Heritage Months

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

We are in a time of unrest and uncertainty, where the cultural diversity that should be seen as a source of strength in our Maryland communities is more and more often positioned as a source of potential division. Perhaps no one has felt the ravages of this attempted division more than our Jewish and Muslim communities, who have often found themselves viewed through a lens of animosity and conflict which consistently threatens to obscure all else. Rather than appreciation for the rich contributions these communities have made throughout history, or for their values, faith, and traditions, the focus has often narrowed to a single narrative: what separates them.

I want to express my appreciation for Delegates Wolek and Solomon for their leadership on House Bill 0661 (**HB0661**), ensuring that the over 250,000 Jewish Americans and 350,000 Muslim Americans who call our great state home see that, here in Maryland, we recognize the importance of celebrating and honoring the true value that their communities bring to our neighborhoods, communities, and municipalities.

But that does not mean we can pretend ignorance of the potential damage that an environment of mistrust and division can create. Nearly 30,000 residents impacted by this bill have established homes and communities in Howard County, and Howard County Government and my office remain conscious of our role in protecting all members of our community from discrimination, hate, bias, and harm. Through initiatives like our Hate Has No Place series, developed in partnership through our Office of Human Rights & Equity and Human Rights Commission, or our Howard County Police Department's (HCPD) team of full-time community outreach officers focusing on community engagement and reporting of hate crimes and hate bias incidents (HBIs), we make it clear: discrimination and hate bias have no place in Howard County.

We know that fear, othering, misinformation, and bias are deep contributors to environments which may lead our Jewish American and Muslim American neighbors to feel unwelcome in our state. This legislation not only establishes standardized month-long celebrations highlighting these communities, it also, and perhaps more importantly, calls on our educational and cultural organizations to maintain programs and activities which deepen understanding and appreciation of these unique and vital



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communities. It is one thing to say we are a County and State which welcomes all-it is another to take concrete action which shifts belonging from a concept to a reality.

I urge the Committee's support for **HB0661**, ensuring another step forward to safeguarding Maryland as a state where all residents feel seen, understood, and valued.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Calvin Ball', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive