

Testimony Supporting HB 661
General Provisions, Commemorative Months,
Muslim American Heritage and Jewish American Heritage Months.

Respectfully Submitted by

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My name is Rabbi Susan Grossman. While I am a Commissioner on the Governor's Commission on Middle Eastern American Affairs, I am submitting this written testimony as a private citizen and interfaith leader in support of HB 661, General Provisions, Commemorative Months, which establishes January as Muslim American Heritage Month and May as Jewish American Heritage Month.

State Ethnic Heritage Months inspire schools, cultural institutions, and community organizations to celebrate and learn more about the different heritages of our citizens. At a time when inclusion and diversity are under siege, Heritage Months encourage and strengthen the social fabric of understanding and mutual responsibility in our communities and schools by improving our citizens' respect for one another and our myriad differences. Indeed, the tapestry of our diverse identities as Marylanders is one of the most precious things uniting us in a nation torn by derision and division.

Maryland already recognizes several Heritage Months by statute: Irish-American, Caribbean, Hispanic, German-American, and American Indian Heritage Months. There are also Black and Women's History Months.ⁱ

The Jewish and Muslim communities are two significant Maryland minorities missing from that list. Over the last few years, hate-bias incidents against both of our communities have been exacerbated by national and international events. In this environment of misinformation and cultural tension, students, in particular, are vulnerable to student-on-student hate bias harassment in our public schools and universities. Such incidents leave a degree of permanent trauma that no child should have to endure.

The most recent annual Audit of Antisemitic Incidents in Maryland by ADL recorded 356 antisemitic incidents in 2024, up 5% from 2023 and 227% since 2022, a troubling pattern that unfortunately places Maryland among the states with the highest number of reported antisemitic incidents in the nation. An additional 107 antisemitic incidents were recorded in Maryland's K-12 schools. Meanwhile, in 2024, Jewish institutions faced an increase in targeted harassment, with incidents at these locations rising by 67%. Just this past February, a synagogue in Olney was defaced with antisemitic graffiti.

The 2023 State of Maryland's own *Hate Bias Report* found that antisemitic bias incidents had tripled from 2022 to 2023, with Jews representing 28% of victims of bias, even though Jews comprise only 4% of the State's population.

These statistics only reflect what is reported. I can assure you, from personal conversations with students and community members, that many incidents go unreported. I know from these conversations that they have seen a worsening shift over the last two years.

The ACLU reported that hate crimes against Muslims also rose in 2024, exacerbated by anti-immigrant sentiment.ⁱⁱ That anti-immigrant sentiment has only intensified over the last year.

The kind of education encouraged by Muslim and Jewish Heritage Months can help combat such rising hate.

HB 661 has brought together the Jewish and Muslim communities to support its passage at a time when international events have tested the alliance between our two communities. We stand united today to urge the passage of this bill codifying the celebration of our Jewish and Muslim heritages.

This bill gives me hope for a more cooperative future, one strengthened by the opportunities offered by Jewish and Muslim Heritage Months, should this bill become law. Thank you for your attention, and I urge a favorable report.

ⁱ <https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/01glance/html/holidays.html>.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.aclu.org/anti-muslim-discrimination>.