



WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB177

Criminal Law – Interference with Access to or Egress From a Religious Facility – Prohibition

**Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Hearing Date: January 20, 2026**

Submitted by: [Jewish Federation of Annapolis & the Chesapeake](#)
Position: FAVORABLE

The Jewish Federation of Annapolis & the Chesapeake strongly supports **SB177**, legislation that would prohibit interference with access to or egress from religious facilities and establish appropriate criminal penalties for such conduct.

At a time of rising antisemitism and increasing incidents of religious hatred across the United States, it is essential that Maryland take clear, proactive steps to ensure that people of all faiths can safely and freely access their places of worship, schools, cemeteries, and community centers without fear, intimidation, or obstruction.

Why This Bill Is Necessary

Across the country, protests and acts of harassment have increasingly targeted religious institutions—not only through speech, but through **physical obstruction, intimidation, and blocking of entrances and exits**. These actions go beyond protected expression and cross into conduct that threatens public safety, religious freedom, and basic civil rights.

SB177 is **narrowly tailored**, content-neutral legislation modeled after long-standing laws that protect access to medical facilities. It does not restrict speech or peaceful protest; rather, it ensures that individuals can enter and exit religious facilities without being physically blocked, threatened, or intimidated.

Impact on the Jewish Community

For the Jewish community, this issue is not theoretical.

In recent years, Jewish institutions across the United States—including synagogues, Jewish community centers, and Hillel buildings on college campuses—have experienced:

- Protesters blocking entrances during worship services or events
- Demonstrators surrounding doors, chanting aggressively, or preventing entry
- Community members feeling unsafe or fearful when attempting to attend religious services, educational programs, or cultural gatherings

Students attempting to enter Hillel facilities and families arriving for Shabbat or holiday services have, in some cases, been forced to turn away or wait for police assistance. This kind of intimidation has a chilling effect on religious practice and communal life and undermines the promise of religious freedom.

Examples Across Faith Communities in the United States

Importantly, this problem affects **many faiths**, underscoring the need for a law that protects **all religious communities equally**:

- **Jewish institutions:** Synagogues and Jewish community centers in multiple states have experienced protesters blocking doors, surrounding entrances, or creating threatening conditions during services or events.
- **Christian churches:** In several U.S. cities, churches have reported demonstrators physically blocking entrances during worship services, harassing congregants as they attempted to enter, or obstructing access during religious ceremonies.
- **Muslim mosques:** Mosques have faced protests and hostile gatherings that have interfered with entry, particularly during Friday prayers or religious holidays, leaving worshippers fearful or unable to safely access the building.
- **Other faith communities:** Sikh gurdwaras, Hindu temples, and other religious facilities have also reported incidents of harassment and obstruction tied to broader political or social tensions.

These incidents demonstrate that **no faith community is immune**, and that the state has a compelling interest in ensuring safe, unobstructed access to religious spaces.

Why SB177 Is a Reasonable and Constitutional Response

This bill:

- Protects **conduct**, not beliefs or speech
- Applies **equally to all faiths**
- Mirrors existing, constitutionally upheld protections for access to medical facilities
- Preserves the right to protest while drawing a clear line at physical obstruction and intimidation

Freedom of speech does not include the right to physically block doors, trap people inside buildings, or prevent lawful access to religious institutions.

Conclusion

The Jewish Federation of Annapolis & the Chesapeake believes that **SB177 is a necessary, measured, and timely response** to a real and growing problem.

Everyone—regardless of faith—deserves to feel safe entering their house of worship, school, cemetery, or community center. Ensuring unobstructed access to religious facilities is not only a matter of public safety, but a fundamental affirmation of religious freedom and mutual respect.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE report** on **SB177**.

About the Jewish Federation of Annapolis & the Chesapeake:

We bring together a diverse array of organizations, including Congregation Kneseth Israel, Congregation Kol Shalom, Hadassah (Annapolis Chapter), Jewish War Veterans (Uriah Levy Post 380), Jewish Women International (Tradition Chapter), Temple Beth Shalom and Temple Solel (Bowie).