

CHRIS WEST
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Judicial Proceedings Committee



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

January 20, 2026

The Maryland State Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Senate Bill 177 – Criminal Law – Interference with Access to or Egress from a Religious Facility – Prohibition

Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

It has become a sad reality of our time that there is an uptick in anti-religious extremism, regardless of faith. In particular, the wave of antisemitism, which we have experienced since Hamas attacked and murdered hundreds of innocent Israeli citizens, has been appalling culminating in the recent torching of the synagogue in Jackson, Mississippi. I believe this Committee and those watching this hearing would agree that Marylanders should not fear for their safety or property whenever they go to worship. They should have free and safe access to their chosen religious facilities. At the same time, religious facilities should have the right to exclude those people regarded as threats from their premises.

This bill is an identical reintroduction of last year's Senate Bill 287. Similar to last year, Senate Bill 177 adopts the same prohibitions and punishments the State of Maryland has for preventing access or egress for a medical facility (as defined in Section 10-204 of the Criminal Law Article) to religious facilities. The bill defines religious facilities as a place of worship, a cemetery, religious school, educational or community facility, and the grounds adjacent to them.

The operative language of Senate Bill 177 states that a person may not intentionally act, alone or with others, to prevent another person from entering or exiting a religious facility by physically detaining the other or obstructing, impeding or hindering the other's passage. The bill explicitly excludes the CEO of the religious facility or the CEO's designee or an agent of the religious facility or a law enforcement officer.

Anyone who violates the law will be guilty of a misdemeanor and subject to up to 90 days in jail or to a fine up to \$1,000 or both. Last year, the Maryland Catholic Conference offered their support with amendments, attached to my testimony, you will find the proposed amendment which I am pleased to accept and urge you to adopt..

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I appreciate the Committee's consideration of Senate Bill 177 and will be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.

Amendments to Senate Bill 287

Amendment No. 1

On page 3, line 6, strike “CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER” and insert “PERSON IN CHARGE”

Amendment No. 2

On page 3, line 8, strike “CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER” and insert “PERSON IN CHARGE”

Amendment No. 3

On page 3, line 10, after “FACILITY”, insert “OR OTHER PERSON AUTHORIZED BY THE RELIGIOUS FACILITY, OR OTHERWISE ACTING IN GOOD FAITH ON ITS BEHALF TO PROTECT THE RELIGIOUS FACILITY OR ITS ACTIVITIES”

Amendment No. 4

On page 3, line 13, insert “(3) A RELIGIOUS FACILITY RETAINS THE SOLE DISCRETION TO DETERMINE WHO MAY BE ON ITS PREMISES, AS DETERMINED BY THE INTERNAL DICTATES OF THAT RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION.”