

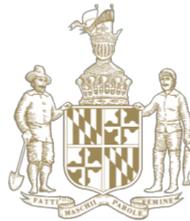
Testimony SB177.pdf

Uploaded by: Christopher West

Position: FAV

CHRIS WEST
Legislative District 42
Baltimore and Carroll Counties

Judicial Proceedings Committee



Annapolis Office
James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 322
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3648
800-492-7122 Ext. 3648
Chris.West@senate.maryland.gov

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..

CHRIS WEST
Legislative District 42
Baltimore and Carroll Counties

Judicial Proceedings Committee



Annapolis Office
James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 322
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3648
800-492-7122 Ext. 3648
Chris.West@senate.maryland.gov

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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.”

SB177 Criminal Law - Interference With Access to o

Uploaded by: deborah miller

Position: FAV



Testimony in SUPPORT of *Senate Bill 177 – Criminal Law – Interference With Access to or Egress from a Religious Facility – Prohibition*
Judicial Proceedings Committee
January 20, 2026

The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (JCRC) serves as the public affairs and community relations arm of the Jewish community. We represent over 100 Jewish social service agencies, synagogues, and schools throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, equity, and pluralism. We work throughout the region to advocate for our nonprofits that serve the most vulnerable on a non-sectarian basis and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the Jewish community and all Marylanders.

The JCRC supports Senate Bill 177 which prohibits someone from blocking access to or from a religious facility including a place of worship, a cemetery, and a religious school, educational facility or community center. SB 177 also establishes a misdemeanor penalty up to 90 days in jail or a fine up to \$1000 dollars or both. The Bill does not prohibit free speech.

Since its founding in 1938, the JCRC's top priority has been protecting the safety and security of the Jewish Community in our region. To that end we work tirelessly to condemn and combat antisemitism – which is one of the oldest forms of hatred, and in recent times has reached unprecedented and unacceptable levels. Last May in Washington DC, two young people were murdered only because they were Jews outside of the Capital Jewish Museum. Since the 2023 Hamas attack on Israel, antisemitic and anti-Israel rhetoric and violent protests have turned deadly. Jews continue to be targeted and assaulted. In Maryland, the Jewish people comprise 4% of the population but 28.5 percent of hate bias incidents according to the 2024 Maryland State Police Bias Report. And according to the ADL, Maryland was number five in the country for the highest number per capita of antisemitic incidents.

Violent, strident antisemitic tactics underscore the importance of Senate Bill 177 to ensure that our community is safe whether it be at a synagogue, religious school, community center, or Hillel on campus. Since October 7th, 2023, we have seen demonstrators across the country aggressively block entrances to Jewish religious facilities instilling fear and intimidation. Most recently, outside of synagogues in New York City, police had to step up patrols to keep anti-Zionist groups away from congregants. This level of vitriol and hatred is dangerous and unacceptable. It cannot be tolerated in civil society. In our region, the JCRC has been on the frontlines of combatting antisemitism. We will continue to work to ensure not only the safety and security of our community but also the right to religious freedom including access to all our Jewish institutions. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report for Senate Bill 177.

SB 177_Caucus_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Elizabeth Roos

Position: FAV



WRITTEN TESTIMONY

FAVORABLE

SB177 - Criminal Law – Interference With Access to or Egress From a Religious Facility – Prohibition

Judicial Proceedings Committee
January 20, 2026

The Maryland Legislative Jewish Caucus (MLJC), a bipartisan group of Senators and Delegates, **strongly supports** SB 177, which creates a misdemeanor offense for blocking access to religious facilities, similar to existing laws that protect access to medical facilities.

This legislation, which clearly aligns with MLJC's mission of promoting religious freedom, has been proposed at a critical time. Given the documented rise in antisemitic incidents at Jewish institutions, this legislation provides additional legal tools to enhance the safety of those entering and exiting synagogues, Jewish schools, community centers, and cemeteries. While the bill applies to all religious facilities regardless of faith, Jewish institutions have historically been targets of harassment and obstruction.

SB 177 balances the need to protect speech rights while addressing physical access issues. Peaceful protest is protected while providing recourse against those who block access. This is a narrow but concrete protection for basic physical access to religious spaces and signals Maryland's continued commitment to religious freedom.

For these reasons, we request a favorable report on SB 177.

Jewish Federation of Annapolis the Chesapeake tes

Uploaded by: Jennifer Mizrahi

Position: FAV



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).

SB 177 - favorable - religion.pdf

Uploaded by: Kirsten Brown

Position: FAV

Ivan Bates
President



Kirsten N. Brown
Coordinator

Maryland State's Attorneys' Association
3300 North Ridge Road, Suite 185
Ellicott City, Maryland 21043
kbrown@mdsaa.org ~ 301-748-1312

DATE: January 16, 2026

BILL NUMBER: SB 177

POSITION: Favorable

The Maryland State's Attorneys' Association (MSAA) supports Senate Bill 177 and urges this Committee to issue a favorable report.

The right to freely practice one's religion is a right not only enshrined in our Constitution but woven into the shared cultural fabric of our nation. Marylanders should have confidence that their right to attend religious services will be protected and defended at every level of government.

SB 177 gives prosecutors the tools to hold accountable those that would target religious communities and obstruct individuals seeking to attend a religious service. Modeled after similar laws that have successfully protected access to medical facilities, this bill establishes reasonable sanctions for impeding access to or egress from a religious facility, telegraphing the seriousness with which the State of Maryland takes this conduct.

Importantly, this bill establishes protections for religious communities in a way that respects other important, and constitutionally protected, activity, striking an appropriate balance in a way that will survive constitutional scrutiny. Because this bill provides necessary protections for individuals exercising their religious freedom and ensures that faith communities can continue to gather without fear, MSAA urges a favorable report.

SB177 religious faciility access FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Laura Salganik

Position: FAV



Committee: Judicial Proceedings

Testimony: SB177 – Criminal Law – Interference with Access to or Egress from a Religious Facility – Prohibition

Organization: Jewish Community Relations Council of Howard County, MD

Submitting: Laura Salganik, Chair

Position: FAVORABLE

Hearing Date: January 20, 2026

Dear Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee:

The Jewish Community Relations Council is submitting this testimony in favor of SB177. We favor a prohibition on interfering with access to or egress from a religious facility.

The most recent hate crimes data from the FBI paints a disturbing picture of widespread anti-Jewish hate in America. Jews, who account for just 2% of the population in the United States, were the second-most targeted group, with 18% of all reported hate crimes committed against the Jewish community in 2024. This amounts to a 5.8% increase from 2023. A far more disturbing figure is that among all religiously motivated hate crimes, the data showed 69% targeted Jews. Almost half (45%) of these crimes take place at or within a synagogue or at a religious school within or adjacent to a synagogue, and such attacks against synagogues have increased 71.4% since October 7, 2023.

The most recent of such incidents took place Thursday, January 8, 2026, outside Kew Gardens Young Israel Congregation in Queens, NY, a demonstration that forced the early closure of a daycare, two elementary schools and a religious site. November 19, 2025, outside Manhattan's Park Avenue Synagogue, some 200 protesters blocked access to the synagogue, intimidating congregants and guests entering and leaving the building, shouting antisemitic slurs.

Such incidents are not confined to Jews, on November 28, 2025, a man threatened a group of women with violence outside the Dar Al Nur Community Center in Fairfax County, VA, and on the morning of August 27, 2025, a mass shooting occurred at the Church of the Annunciation and its religious school in Minneapolis, MN. Following the recent attack on Beth Israel Congregation in Jackson, MS, failing to provide such protection may result in escalation of such interference.

Maryland must act to protect all its citizens, of every faith, and specifically their safe access to and egress from their houses of worship. Such protection will allow all who call Maryland home to feel safe entering and leaving a house of worship, and it may reduce the potential for physical harm and intimidation against those who choose to freely practice their religion through communal worship.

ADL MD SB177 Written Testimony - buffer zones.pdf

Uploaded by: Meredith Weisel

Position: FAV



**Maryland General Assembly
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
January 20, 2026**

Testimony of Meredith R. Weisel
ADL VP, State and Local Advocacy

ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) is pleased to submit this written testimony in strong support of SB177, “*Criminal Law – Interference With Access to or Egress From a Religious Facility – Prohibition.*” We urge the committee to advance this bill to uphold the sanctity and security of religious freedom across Maryland for all communities.

As the leading anti-hate organization in the world, founded in 1913, ADL's mission remains to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all. Today, we persist in tackling all forms of antisemitism and extremism, leveraging innovation and partnerships to drive effective change.

There is an urgent need for measures like SB177. ADL's most recent Audit of Antisemitic Incidents tracked 9,354 antisemitic incidents across the country in 2024, representing a 344% increase over the past five years. This reflects, by far, the highest number ADL has recorded since we began tracking in 1979. In Maryland specifically, the year 2024 saw 356 antisemitic incidents, the sixth-highest level in a state across the country and a 227% increase since 2022. This includes 65 incidents at Jewish institutions or schools, representing a 67% rise from the previous year.

Faith communities across the nation are encountering increasing levels of hate-based incidents, according to the latest data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The 2024 FBI hate crime data reveals that there were 3,003 reported faith-based hate incidents impacting all faith communities. In Maryland, religion-based hate incidents made up 316 of the 921 (34.3%) incidents reported in 2024, according to the Maryland Department of State Police's 2024 Hate Bias Report. And nationwide there have been instances where individuals of faith have felt afraid to attend houses of worship, amplifying the urgency for legal protections like those proposed in SB177.

Incidents at synagogues in particular have increased substantially in recent years, with a rise in bomb threats, harassment, assaults and protests. The most recent protests in NYC in front of several synagogues and the attack on Beth Israel Congregation in Jackson, Mississippi, is part of a broader context in which the Jewish community is continuing to face an unprecedentedly high threat environment in the U.S. and across the world. American Jews are increasingly living in fear of violent attacks, being targeted by conspiracy theories drawing on historical antisemitic tropes, and suffering marginalization due to expressions of anti-Israel animus that frequently cross the line into antisemitism. Similar incidents have been reported in various regions, demonstrating that the threat to religious freedom and safety is not isolated to Maryland but is a widespread issue necessitating immediate legislative intervention.

The proposed legislation provides crucial legal measures to ensure that individuals can access and exit religious facilities without fear of physical interference, thereby safeguarding the fundamental right to religious freedom. Further, it does not infringe on constitutionally protected speech or activity. Instead, SB177 recognizes that the compelling interest in safe and unimpeded access to places of worship can be accomplished, and its intent is to not seek to favor one viewpoint over another or limit speech regarding any specific topic. With its passage, Maryland will send the clear message that it prioritizes and respects the security and safety of its diverse faith communities and that intentional physical obstruction of access to places of worship will not be tolerated.

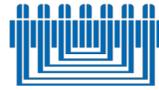
Thank you for considering ADL's position on this crucial legislation and working to affirm the state's commitment to protecting religious freedoms and upholding the rights of all to freely access places of worship.

**We urge the Judicial Proceedings Committee to give
Senate Bill 177 a favorable report.**

SB 177 - Interference with access to a religious f

Uploaded by: Sarah Miicke

Position: FAV



OFFICERS

ROBIN WEIMAN
President

RICHARD GRATZ

SARAH GROSSMAN

AMALIA HONICK

RABBI STEVEN SCHWARTZ

RABBI JONATHAN SEIDEMANN

MELANIE SHAPIRO

ELIZABETH GREEN
Past President

HOWARD LIBIT
Executive Director

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

- Adat Chaim Congregation
- American Jewish Committee
- Americans for Peace Now
Baltimore Chapter
- American Israel Public Affairs Committee
- American Red Magen David for Israel
- American Zionist Movement
- Amit Women
- Association of Reform Zionists of America
- Baltimore Board of Rabbis
- Baltimore Hebrew Congregation
- Baltimore Jewish Green and Just Alliance
- Baltimore Men's ORT
- Baltimore Zionist District
- Beth Am Congregation
- Beth El Congregation
- Beth Israel Congregation
- Beth Shalom Congregation of
Howard County
- Beth Tfiloh Congregation
- Bnai Brith, Chesapeake Bay Region
- Bnai Israel Congregation
- Bnai Jacob Shaarei Zion Congregation
- Bolton Street Synagogue
- Chebra A Havas Chesed, Inc.
- Chevrei Tzedek Congregation
- Chizuk Amuno Congregation
- Congregation Beir Tikvah
- Congregation Tiferes Yisroel
- Federation of Jewish Women's
Organizations of Maryland
- Hadassah
- Har Sinai - Oheb Shalom Congregation
J Street
- Jewish Federation of Howard County
- Jewish Labor Committee
- Jewish War Veterans
- Jewish War Veterans, Ladies Auxiliary
- Jewish Women International
- Jews For Judaism
- Moses Montefiore Anshe Emunah
Hebrew Congregation
- National Council of Jewish Women
- Ner Tamid Congregation
- Rabbinical Council of America
- Religious Zionists of America
- Shaarei Tfiloh Congregation
- Shomrei Emunah Congregation
- Suburban Orthodox Congregation
- Temple Beth Shalom
- Temple Isaiah
- Zionist Organization of America
Baltimore District

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

**Senate Bill 177- Criminal Law - Interference with Access to or
Egress From a Religious Facility – Prohibition**

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

January 20, 2026

Support

Background: Modeled after legislation preventing the blocking of access to medical facilities, this legislation would establish a misdemeanor penalty for those who block access to the entrance of religious facilities. Religious facilities include a place of worship, cemetery, religious school, educational facility, community center, and the grounds adjacent to them.

Written Comments: The Baltimore Jewish Council (BJC) represents The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore and all its agencies, and programs, as well as the organized Jewish Community of Baltimore. As incidents of protest increase across the country, it is important that access to religious facilities remains a priority and that people feel safe entering them.

We have seen students at Hillels on college campuses and community members at their local synagogues feel intimidated and fearful of entering these facilities because protestors have blocked the entrances. Earlier this winter, we saw protestors chanting pro-Hamas slogans seeking to block access to a synagogue in Queens, N.Y., as well as a similar protest to disrupt and block access to a gathering at a synagogue located in Koreatown in Los Angeles.

This behavior is unacceptable, and access to all faith facilities should be safeguarded by the state.

For these reasons, we ask for a favorable report on SB177.

The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of the Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.

MD Catholic Conference_SB 177_FWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Garrett O'Day

Position: FWA



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

January 20, 2026

SB 177

Criminal Law - Interference With Access to or Egress From a Religious Facility - Prohibition

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Position: FAVORABLE w/Amendment

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 177 with amendments. The Catholic Conference represents the public policy interests of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, including the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington and the Diocese of Wilmington, which together encompass over one million Marylanders.

This legislation would make it illegal for any person or group to prevent another from entering or exiting a “religious facility”. Religious facilities would include any place of worship, cemetery, or any faith-based educational facility or community center.

This legislation aims to ensure that no person is prevented from peaceable ingress and egress into a religious facility. Where such disruption is attempted, it is often times born out of a disagreement with or protest to one’s faith tradition or beliefs and/or the activities associated therewith. Pope Francis has stated that the “problem of intolerance must be confronted in all its forms” and that where persons are “persecuted and marginalized because of [their] religious convictions or ethnic identity, the wellbeing of society as a whole is endangered and each one of us must feel affected.” (Pope Francis, *Address to a Delegation from the Simon Wiesenthal Center*, 2013)

The freedom to peacefully worship has been a seminal part of the history of our great state and a value Marylanders have prioritized for centuries. Likewise, we believe the purpose of this bill to be aligned with that continuing tradition and priority. However, we do believe there to be some hypothetical limitations in the exceptions provided for in this legislation and offer some small amendments to Senate Bill 177, attached hereto.

We thank the sponsors of this bill for their steadfast commitment to upholding religious liberty in Maryland. We urge this committee to accept the proposed amendments to Senate Bill 1777 prior to passage of this well-intentioned legislation. Thank you for your consideration.

Amendments to Senate Bill 177

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.”

AGUDATH - SB177 - ACCESS & EGRESS RELIG FACILITIES

Uploaded by: Rabbi Ariel Sadwin

Position: FWA



SENATE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE

JANUARY 20, 2026

SENATE BILL 177

**CRIMINAL LAW - INTERFERENCE WITH ACCESS TO OR EGRESS FROM A RELIGIOUS
FACILITY - PROHIBITION**

FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT

Agudath Israel of Maryland, the Mid-Atlantic regional office of Agudath Israel of America, a renowned national Jewish advocacy organization with chapters across the country, speaks on behalf of the Orthodox Jewish communities across Maryland and on the behalf of the many (+60) Orthodox synagogues within our state, as well as the many other religious facilities utilized by our faith community. We stand today in support of Senate Bill 177, with amendments.

SB 177 would prohibit a person or persons from impeding others from entering or exiting a religious facility, including places of worship, cemeteries, and religious educational facilities. The need to ensure that people of faith are able to worship without fear and without harassment is clear. In recent years, members of the Jewish faith have seen politically-motivated and antisemitic protesters target synagogues, barring people from being able to safely enter and exit as well as creating an atmosphere of intimidation and fear. While freedom of speech allows for peaceful protests regardless of ideological content, there is no right to impede others from utilizing places of worship.

In order to best advance the goals of this bill, we urge slightly amending the bill to ensure that religious facilities retain their ability to regulate activity within their grounds while protecting the rights of worshippers. We trust that the amendments below preserve the intent and aims of SB 177, and thus respectfully ask that you issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 177, as amended.

Thank you.

Amendments to Senate Bill 177

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.”