



TESTIMONY FOR HB0315

Hate Crimes and Hate Bias - Definitions of Sexual Orientation and Hate Bias Incident

Bill Sponsor: Delegate Vogel

Committee: Judiciary

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Aileen Alex, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of HB0315 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists, and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

HB0315 addresses the need to modernize and expand definitions within Maryland's hate crime statutes to better reflect the realities of hate-motivated incidents. Specifically, it seeks to address gaps in the legal framework that fail to capture certain acts of hostility or aggression motivated by bias, which may not currently qualify as crimes under state or federal law.

The bill proposes altering the definition of "sexual orientation" in hate crime statutes to include an individual's identity or others' perceptions of their identity in relation to gender attraction. It also introduces the term "hate bias incident," defining it as acts of hostility or aggression motivated by bias against a protected class, even if the acts do not constitute crimes. Furthermore, the bill mandates that the Department of State Police collect, analyze, and report data on hate bias incidents provided by law enforcement agencies.

For Marylanders, this legislation strengthens protections for individuals targeted by hate-motivated acts, ensuring that such incidents are recognized and addressed even if they fall outside traditional criminal definitions. By expanding the scope of hate crime statutes and requiring data collection, the bill promotes accountability and provides a clearer picture of bias-related issues in the state.

Ultimately, HB0315 enhances Maryland's commitment to combating hate and fostering inclusivity. It ensures that all residents, regardless of their identity, are protected from bias-motivated hostility and that law enforcement has the tools to track and respond to these incidents effectively.

We strongly support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.