



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**HB 513: Hate Crimes and Hate Bias - Definitions of Sexual Orientation and Hate Bias Incident**

Judiciary Committee

Tuesday, February 11th, 2025 - 1:00PM

Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Several years ago, this Committee established the Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention to evaluate how Maryland can more effectively prevent, identify, and respond to bias-motivated harm. In its report, the Commission concluded that the “first and most critical recommendation is to clearly define a hate bias incident in statute.”<sup>1</sup> Without a clear statutory definition, Maryland lacks consistency in how non-criminal hate incidents are identified, tracked, and reported—leaving policymakers and communities without a full picture of the bias-driven harm occurring across the state.

HB 513 directly addresses this gap by codifying a clear, comprehensive definition of ‘hate bias incident’ for reporting and data-collection purposes. The bill carefully distinguishes hate bias incidents from criminal conduct, recognizing that these acts may fall short of a crime while still causing real harm to individuals and communities. This approach improves data accuracy without expanding criminal penalties or infringing on constitutionally protected speech.

The bill also updates the statutory definition of ‘sexual orientation,’ another recommendation included in the Commission’s report. The Commission emphasized the need for a definition that can “grow with society’s understanding of sexual orientation.” Modernizing this language ensures Maryland law reflects the realities of how individuals are targeted—often based on perception rather than identity—and avoids excluding those who experience bias-motivated harm under outdated statutory language.

Together, these changes strengthen Maryland’s hate bias reporting framework, improve consistency across jurisdictions, and support evidence-based prevention efforts. Just as importantly, they affirm to impacted communities that the State recognizes and takes seriously bias-driven harm, even when it does not rise to the level of a criminal offense.

HB 513 does not create new crimes or penalties. It simply carries forward the thoughtful, consensus-driven recommendations of the Commission this Committee helped establish.

**I urge the Committee to give a favorable report on HB 513.**

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<sup>1</sup> [Maryland Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention Annual Report 2024](#)