

## **2023 Maryland General Assembly Legislative Session Wrap-Up**

The Maryland General Assembly wrapped up its 445<sup>th</sup> session on April 10<sup>th</sup>. It was a historic session because of new budgetary authority given to lawmakers. For the first time in 100 years, the General Assembly was able to increase, decrease, and shift money around in Governor Wes Moore's proposed budget. The JCRC chalked up many successes in the State's \$63 billion dollar budget in terms of capital and operating dollars. The agency also advocated successfully for legislation to increase Holocaust education, combat the dramatic increase in antisemitism, ensure reproductive freedom and reduce gun violence.

### **Budget/Funding Success:**

2023 was an extraordinarily successful year in terms of our budget priorities in the FY24 State budget. Nearly all of our budget requests were met, and some were even increased. We are grateful that the Governor and General Assembly allocated more than \$1 million dollars in capital funding for the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington's (JFGW) Community Impact Center of Montgomery County. This funding will be utilized to replace JFGW's failing roof and enhance the security of its headquarters by repairing its windows and facades.

Given the dramatic rise in antisemitism, the Governor also increased our operating budget request of \$2 million dollars to \$3 million dollars for security at our nonpublic schools and childcare centers through the Hate Crimes Grant (HCG) program. Additionally, the final budget included our request of \$5 million dollars in security for all houses of worship through the Protecting Against Hate Crimes (PAHC) grant program. Unfortunately, our \$10 million dollars request for the BOOST (Broadening Options & Opportunities for Students) program, which helps students offset nonpublic school tuition costs, was reduced to \$9 million dollars. The Governor had cut the program to \$8 million as he intends to gradually phase it out. However, after much back and forth between the Senate and House, \$1 million was added back in bringing the program funding back to \$9 million by the end of the session.

The JCRC also advocated to secure funds for our non-sectarian social service agencies. JSSA received \$350,000 dollars to meet the needs of Holocaust Survivors, and \$225,000 dollars to help support its Aging in Place services. The ElderSAFE Center of the Charles E. Smith Life Communities' (CESLC) received \$75,000 dollars to protect older victims of abuse, and the Maryland Israel Development Center (MIDC) received \$300,000 dollars to promote bilateral trade between Maryland and Israel.

We also advocated to secure Legislative Bond Initiatives - \$150,000 dollars for the Torah School and \$150,000 for Makom/JFGH.

### **Legislative/Policy Success:**

The disturbing increase in antisemitism across Maryland and in Montgomery County prompted State Senator Ben Kramer (D19) to introduce a package of bills to combat this age-old hatred. The JCRC testified in Annapolis in support of this legislation. Four out of five of Senator Kramer's bills passed. The only exception was *Educate to Stop the Hate Act* (SB837/HB1241), which would have required the Department of Education to develop guidelines to enhance Holocaust education throughout the state. This legislation did not make it out of committee. Below are all the bills which we supported and were signed into law by the Governor.

**1. Hate Crimes - Civil Remedy (SB5/HB13)**

This bill authorizes a person who is aggrieved by an act that would constitute a violation of the State's hate crime laws to bring a civil action against the individual(s) who committed the act and authorizes a court to award a variety of specified remedies. Those remedies include awarding economic damages, noneconomic damages, such as pain and suffering, emotional distress, mental anguish, loss of enjoyment, and loss of companionship. It goes into effect on October 1, 2023.

**2. Maryland Holocaust Remembrance Day (SB842/HB1244)**

This bill establishes a Maryland Holocaust Remembrance Day to coincide with International Holocaust Remembrance Day annually on January 27<sup>th</sup>. The purpose of this bill is not only to commemorate the six million Jews and millions of others murdered, but to promote Holocaust Education to prevent future genocides. The Bill will supplement our educational initiatives to help build empathy and an understanding of our past. It goes into effect on October 1, 2023.

**3. Public Safety – Protecting Against Hate Crimes Funds – Establishment (SB840/HB1240)**

This bill establishes the Protecting Against Hate Crimes Grant Fund as a special, non-lapsing fund to make grants to nonprofit organizations, including faith-based organizations, to provide security enhancements to protect against hate. Beginning in fiscal year 2025, the Governor may include a minimum of \$1 million dollars and a maximum of \$5 million dollars in this Fund. It goes into effect on July 1, 2023.

**4. Local School Systems - Student Field Trips – Funding (SB841/HB1242)**

This bill requires the Governor to include \$500,000 dollars in the budget for the State Department of Education to fund school field trips to museums of “cultural import.” This means a museum that provides historic and sociological learning opportunities on the history and culture of an oppressed and historically underrepresented community. These museums include the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the National Museum of African American History, the Jewish Museum of Maryland, and The Reginald F. Lewis Museum of African American History and Culture. It goes into effect on July 1, 2023.

**5. Hate Crimes - Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention – Establishment (HB1066)**

This bill establishes the Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention to examine how to reduce hate crimes and address the dramatic rise in antisemitism and all forms of bigotry. This commission will be staffed by a full-time Assistant Attorney General. It will also include representatives from the community including the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington, the Anti-Defamation League, the Baltimore Jewish Council, and many others who work to combat antisemitism, intolerance, and hatred. It goes into effect on June 1, 2023.

#### **6. Declaration of Rights – Right to Reproductive Freedom (SB798/HB705)**

This bill puts the Constitutional Amendment for Reproductive Freedom on the 2024 general election ballot in Maryland. Voters will be asked to enshrine abortion rights into the State Constitution next year. The amendment affirms that every person has the fundamental right to reproductive freedom, including the ability to decide to prevent, continue, or end one's own pregnancy. In the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*, the General Assembly decided it was in the state's best interest to put this right into Maryland's Constitution to assure it continues unchallenged.

#### **7. Reproductive Health Care Act (SB859/HB 808)**

This bill ensures that Maryland remains a safe haven for reproductive health and that patients and clinicians are protected from out of state criminal, civil and administrative penalties for providing or receiving legal reproductive healthcare in Maryland. Since the Supreme Court handed down the *Dobbs* decision, 14 states have either fully or nearly banned abortions. Also, many new state laws now target providers where they could face 5-10 years in prison for prescribing abortion pills. In Maryland, clinicians often see patients from states with abortion bans so shielding laws are critical to ensuring reproductive access. It goes into effect on June 1, 2023.

#### **8. Gun Safety Act of 2023 (SB1)**

This Bill prohibits individuals from knowingly wearing, carrying, or transporting a firearm onto the property of another person unless they have been given permission to do so. The Gun Safety Act of 2023 prohibits a person from possessing a firearm in proximity to protected areas like schools, sporting arenas, parks, museums, and hospitals. Essentially, it brings Maryland in line with the Supreme Court *Bruen* decision which effectively struck down concealed weapon carry laws. The bill is intended to further protect communities and reduce gun violence which continues to be a crisis in Maryland and across the country. It goes into effect on October 1, 2023.

#### **9. Election Law – Ballot issuance, Processing, and Reporting Procedures and 2024 Primary (SB379/HB535)**

This bill allows for earlier processing of mail-in ballots. It also includes language to ensure that, in 2024, the statewide primary election and the primary election for municipal offices in Baltimore City shall be held on the second Tuesday in May. Originally, the 2024 primary election was scheduled to be held during Passover, preventing members of the Jewish community from participating in our essential, democratic voting process. It goes into effect on October 1, 2023.

#### **10. Criminal Law - Sexual Crimes - Repeal of Spousal Defense (SB 129/HB4)**

This bill repeals a prohibition on prosecuting a person for rape or sexual offense against a victim who was the person's legal spouse at the time of the alleged rape or sexual offense. After failing to pass the senate three years in a row, this bill was finally approved in both chambers making it a crime to sexually assault or rape your spouse. It goes into effect on October 1, 2023.

**11. Task Force to Study Nonpublic Student Bus Transportation (SB324/HB486)**

This bill establishes a Task Force to Study Nonpublic Student Bus Transportation. This Task Force will study and make recommendations concerning nonpublic student bus transportation matters. The Task Force takes effect on July 1, 2023.