

Advocacy

Maryland Jewish

DAY RECEPTION 2024



Providing the Needed Legislative Support for Removal of an Individual from a Statutorily Created Entity

It's important for there to be a mechanism for suspending or removing a member of a statutorily created board, committee, commission, task force, or workgroup if they no longer represent the best interest of the group. For example, if someone who is appointed to the Maryland Sexual Assault Evidence Kit Policy and Funding Commission is accused of committing sexual assault, they need to be able to be removed, or at least suspended until the accusation is resolved. Another example could be the need to suspend a physician from the State Board of Physicians due to pending litigation and until the case is resolved.

HB809: Members of Boards, Committees, Commissions, Task Forces, or Workgroups – Removal or Suspension (Del. Joe Vogel)

In partnership with the Attorney General's Office, this legislation would give authority to the individual or entity that has appointed someone to serve on a statutorily created board, committee, commission, task force, or workgroup to suspend or remove the member for misconduct, incompetence, neglect of duties, or any other cause deemed reasonable.

Why is this bill good for Maryland and the Jewish Community?

By allowing an appointing authority to hold a member of a commission, committee, task force, or workgroup accountable for their actions, we are embodying the Jewish value of actively pursuing justice, "tzedek, tzedek tirdof."



**Testimony in SUPPORT of *House Bill 699*–
Criminal Law – Hate Crimes – Notice and Removal of Item or Symbol
Environment and Transportation Committee
February 20, 2024**

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 organizations and synagogues throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, and pluralism. We work throughout the region to advocate for our agencies that serve the most vulnerable residents and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the Jewish community and all Marylanders.

The JCRC supports House Bill 699 which requires law enforcement agencies to promptly notify property owners about items or symbols inscribed on their property. It also requires those owners to remove the symbols within 24 hours after being reported to law enforcement. If the property owners do not comply, they could be fined up to \$1000 dollars. This Bill does not apply to property owners who were the intended target of the alleged violation.

The Jewish community is living in a time of heightened and unprecedented antisemitism. Swastikas, nooses, KKK graffiti, and other symbols of hate – including messages that say, “Kill all Jews,” “Hitler was right,” or “Jews not welcome” – are seen defacing buildings and neighborhoods where children walk to school, and families attend synagogue. These symbols are not only disturbing but can cause real harm and threaten one’s sense of security. The ADL reports that in 2022, antisemitic incidents were up 98% in Maryland from the previous year. This spike includes vandalism which jumped 79%. In Montgomery County, the latest report on religious bias incidents shows that more than 85% targeted Jews, although they make up only 10% of the County population. Finally, since the October 7th Hamas attack in Israel, antisemitic incidents nationwide have reached the highest point of any three-month period since the ADL began tracking in 1979. The ADL recorded a total of 3283 antisemitic incidents across the nation, representing a 361% increase compared to the same period one year prior.

HB 699 will go a long way in making the Jewish community feel safer in its neighborhoods. Owners must take responsibility for their property and remove hateful symbols within 24 hours of being reported. This action will reduce the harm marginalized communities feel when seeing symbols of hate on buildings. For the Jewish community, its mere presence creates a pall; a reminder of the Nazi era where these signs were everywhere. For these reasons we urge a favorable report for House Bill 699.



**Testimony in SUPPORT of *House Bill 728 –
Health Insurance – Qualified Resident Enrollment Program
(Access to Care Act)*
Health and Government Operations Committee
February 8, 2024**

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 organizations and synagogues throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, and pluralism. We work tirelessly to advocate for our social service agencies that serve the most vulnerable residents and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the Jewish and broader community.

The JCRC has a long tradition of endorsing policy measures that provide support to immigrant communities. Jewish law and tradition have embraced the stranger and demanded that we help those in need. House Bill 728 – Health Insurance – Qualified Resident Enrollment Program (Access to Care Act) – is critical in providing accessible health care for all Marylanders, regardless of citizenship or employment status. HB 728 will require the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange to establish and implement the Qualified Resident Enrollment Program to facilitate the enrollment of qualified residents in qualified plans.

Not only do we have a moral imperative to treat immigrant communities with compassion and care, but the JCRC also recognizes that access to health benefits, regardless of immigration status, will create a community that is healthier and safer for all Marylanders. For these reasons, we urge a favorable vote on HB 728.



**Testimony in SUPPORT of *House Bill 748 –
Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention –
Code of Conduct*
Judiciary Committee
February 20, 2024**

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 organizations and synagogues throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, and pluralism. We work throughout the region to advocate for our agencies that serve the most vulnerable residents and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the Jewish community and all Marylanders.

House Bill 748- Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention – Code of Conduct requires that the Attorney General make public a code of conduct for members of the Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention as well as a policy for investigating violations of the code of conduct. This Bill also gives the Attorney General the power to remove a member who has violated the code of conduct and to establish a process for the public to report conduct that is antithetical to the Commission.

The Commission is charged with eradicating hate crimes and bias incidents and supporting individuals and communities victimized by hate. It cannot achieve those ends if its members do not abide by a code of conduct. It also cannot function if the Attorney General has no power to remove a member who violates that code of conduct.

In short, if a member of the Hate Crime Prevention Commission espouses hateful language, that member should not be allowed to continue serving and the Attorney General must have the authority to remove them. Words matter and words have consequences. The JCRC supports House Bill 748 as a mechanism to hold Commission members to the highest level of decency and responsibility.



**Testimony in SUPPORT of *House Bill 1041*–
Criminal Law – Hate Crimes – Religion and Disability
Judiciary Committee
February 20, 2024**

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 organizations and synagogues throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, and pluralism. We work throughout the region to advocate for our agencies that serve the most vulnerable residents and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the Jewish community and all Marylanders.

The JCRC has a long history of prioritizing the needs and rights of people with disabilities. Although current law protects people with disability from hate crimes, it does not define “disability”. Under House Bill 1041, “disability” will be defined by the federal *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)* of 1990. We are committed to supporting policy measures to empower individuals with disabilities to achieve maximum independence and break down barriers to inclusion.

House Bill 1041 also expands the definition of a hate crime based on a person’s “religion”. Current state law only protects a person’s “religious belief”. Given the explosion of antisemitism and hate crimes committed against Jewish people because of their Jewish religion, HB 1041 is of paramount importance to the JCRC. According to the ADL, hate crimes and bias incidents against the Jewish community continue to rise at a disturbing rate. In 2022, incidents were up 98% in Maryland from the previous year. Additionally, Montgomery County Police Department’s latest report on religious bias incidents shows that more than 85% targeted Jews, although they only make up only 10% of the County population.

Hate crimes are exploding against Jewish people because of their religion, not just their religious beliefs. A recent survey by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) reported that 63% of Jews—that is people defined not by their beliefs, but by their religion (Jewish) – feel less secure today than a year ago, that’s a 50% increase from the previous year. And for younger Jewish people, the statistics are more alarming: At least 1 in 4 college students avoid wearing, carrying, or displaying items that would identify them as Jewish for fear of antisemitism. For these reasons, we support House Bill 1041.



**Testimony in SUPPORT of *House Bill 1181* –
Education - Curriculum Standards – Antihate and Holocaust Education
(Educate to Stop the Hate Act) –
Ways and Means Committee
February 28, 2024**

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 organizations and synagogues throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, and pluralism. We work throughout the region to advocate for our agencies that serve the most vulnerable residents and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the Jewish community and all Marylanders.

House Bill 1181 requires that the State Board of Education develop curriculum standards and resources for antihate and Holocaust education by January 1, 2025. The Bill applies to elementary, middle, and high school classrooms in all public and nonpublic schools that receive state funding. Additionally, the curriculum would include utilizing historical contexts that have led to contemporary racism and prejudice and the Holocaust. It also will revise the high school history framework to include the contributions of historically disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups.

We are living in a time of heightened hate where every marginalized community seems to be under attack. The spike in racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, and anti-Asian hate is unprecedented. House Bill 58 is a critical piece of legislation to combat such hatred. Students of all ages need to understand history, including bigotry and prejudice, so that horrific events of the past - like the Holocaust - will never be repeated. In the last few months, the Jewish community has seen a 361% increase in antisemitic incidents compared to the same period a year ago. At the JCRC, it seems like a week doesn't go by without a call about vandalism at a synagogue, bullying on a playground, or a swastika found on a school desk. It's unacceptable and has to be addressed.

The Educate to Stop the Hate Act is not a panacea, but it certainly is a necessary step to help stem the tide and fight back against the harmful impact of hatred which undermines the very fabric of our society. HB 1181 is an opportunity to attack all forms of hatred. It's an opportunity we can't afford to miss. For these reasons, we ask for a favorable report on HB 1181.



**Testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 1386 - Education - Employee Training
and Holocaust Education Study - Requirements
Ways and Means Committee
February 26, 2024**

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 agencies that serve the most vulnerable residents and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the Jewish community and all Marylanders.

The JCRC supports House Bill 1386 which requires each county board of education and certain nonpublic schools to provide employees with training on the prevention of antisemitism and Islamophobia each year. It also requires that this type of training be included in cultural diversity training at institutions of higher education and asks the State Department of Education to hire a consultant to assess Holocaust education in middle and high schools.

The JCRC runs a robust education outreach and programming department. Its mission is to combat school-based antisemitism; advocate on behalf of Jewish students, families, and employees; and promote safe, hate-free, respectful learning environments for all students. In Montgomery County, the JCRC is also deeply engaged in addressing all forms of academic inequity. We have strongly supported MCPS' anti-racist audit, we are a proud member of the Black and Brown Coalition for Educational Equity and Excellence, and we also work closely with Identity to support MCPS' Latino youth.

Dramatic spikes in antisemitism over the last several years have been well-documented and show no signs of abating. Indeed, this trend has only intensified since Hamas' October 7th attack on Israel and the ongoing war, resulting in an unprecedented and disturbing 361% increase in antisemitic incidents compared to the same period a year ago. A significant portion of those incidents, from vandalism to bullying to discrimination, have occurred in K-12 educational settings. Even before October 7th, FBI data revealed that 10% of all reported hate crimes occurred on school or college campuses, and that 30% of all juvenile victims of hate crimes were targeted at their schools. According to the ADL, school abased antisemitism in 2022 increased about 50% from the previous year. This includes vandalism and harassment.

The lack of knowledge about the Holocaust is also astounding. According to a recent survey, two-thirds of young Marylanders did not know 6 million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust,

more than half could not name a single concentration camp, and 13% said they believed Jews caused the Holocaust. History has shown that hate and bias, bigotry and prejudice, can lead to violence, dehumanization, and in the case of the Jewish people, extermination of six million. Education and training are critical to helping stem this trajectory of hatred. We need to fully understand the level of Holocaust education across the state so as to create greater accountability and signal to the community that preventing antisemitism is a priority.

School personnel often have limited familiarity with antisemitism and little cultural competency about Jewish ethnicity, Jewish practice, and the critical importance of Israel to the Jewish identities of an overwhelming majority of American Jews. To address this gap, the JCRC has developed an ever-expanding roster of teacher training opportunities for educators. Most critically, we have partnered with the ADL's DC regional office to develop a comprehensive 3-hour training on antisemitism, anti-Zionism, and Jewish identity that has been presented to over 1,400 MCPS personnel. The JCRC strongly believes that school employees should have a baseline competency in the forms of hatred that are significantly manifesting in our schools at this time, both those that are religiously based - antisemitism and Islamophobia - and otherwise. That includes xenophobia, anti-Asian hatred, homophobia, transphobia, and racism. This knowledge can help schools respond swiftly and effectively to hate and bias incidents when they occur.

Our agency also believes that the prevention of antisemitism and Islamophobia must be part of cultural diversity training at institutions of higher education. If these hatreds are not included, it is impossible to disrupt what feels like an endlessly repeating cycle of antisemitic and Islamophobic incidents. Educational leaders must be equipped to address these difficult issues. House Bill 1386 is an expression of our community's commitment to responding forcefully, consistently, and sensitively to a problem that has only continued to worsen over recent months and years, and which undermines the very fabric of our society. It is also a commitment to ensuring that our schools and institutions of higher learning reflect the very best values that we wish to instill in future generations of leaders. For these reasons we urge a favorable report for House Bill 1386.



**Testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 763–
Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention – Membership –
Alterations
Judiciary Committee
February 20, 2024**

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 organizations and synagogues throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, and pluralism. We work throughout the region to advocate for our agencies that serve the most vulnerable residents and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the Jewish community and all Marylanders.

The JCRC supports House Bill 763- to remove the representative of CAIR from the Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention -and to add two new members of the Muslim Community to be vetted and appointed by the Attorney General. It's unfortunate that this bill is necessary. It's something we don't take lightly. However, the hateful, dehumanizing statements made by CAIR leadership on numerous occasions have forced us into this role. Also, our ultimate desire is to have more voices at the table and not fewer. In fact, nothing about this Bill diminishes the JCRC's ironclad commitment to combatting all forms of hatred including Islamophobia.

It has been a privilege for the JCRC to sit on this Commission and participate in its Community Engagement Subcommittee where we are developing best practices for reporting hate crimes and bias incidents. Our mission is to heal the community, not divide it. CAIR is not up to this task. A group that espouses vitriol and hatred for the Jewish community does not deserve nor belong on a Commission that has been established to respond to and prevent hate. We are expected to work WITH one another, not AGAINST one another. On October 7th, the Jewish people experienced the most brutal attack since the Holocaust. Hamas murdered 1200 people and took 240 hostages. CAIR's response? It praised Hamas and compared Israel to Nazi Germany. Comments so egregious that President Biden rebuked CAIR and removed the organization from the White House's blueprint to address antisemitism.

CAIR has proven it cannot be a trusted partner. Therefore, it must be replaced with two other representatives of the Muslim Community. The Commission is a wonderfully diverse group charged with promoting tolerance and understanding. We must collaborate and engage in

constructive dialogue to serve as a role model for all of Maryland to respond to and prevent hate. We look forward to having two new Muslim representatives on this Commission who have the same ironclad commitment to combating antisemitism, that we have the same ironclad commitment to combating antisemitism, that we have to combatting Islamophobia and all forms of hatred. For these reasons, we support HB 763.



**Testimony in SUPPORT of *House Bill 809*–
Members of Boards, Committees, Commissions, Task Forces or Workgroups –
Removal or Suspension
Health and Government Operations Committee
February 20, 2024**

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 organizations and synagogues throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, and pluralism. We work throughout the region to advocate for our agencies that serve the most vulnerable residents and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the Jewish community and all Marylanders.

The JCRC supports House Bill 809- Members of Boards, Committees, Commissions, Task Forces, or Workgroups- Removal or Suspension. Our organization is one of 23 members of the State’s Commission on Hate Crimes Response and Prevention. This Commission is tasked with eradicating hate crimes and bias incidents and with supporting individuals and communities victimized by hate. Right now, our Jewish community is under assault. According to the ADL, antisemitic incidents in 2022 surged to the highest level ever with Maryland seeing a 98% increase. In Montgomery County, incidents were up 261%. And since the horrific Hamas terrorist attack in Israel on October 7th, antisemitic incidents have skyrocketed 361% compared to the same period in the previous year.

This Commission – chaired by the Attorney General -is critical in helping not only the Jewish community, but all marginalized racial, ethnic, faith and LGBTQ+ communities- to combat hatred and feel safe & secure. The commission can NOT do that work if its members don’t abide by core values such as respect, empathy, and professionalism. It cannot function if the Attorney General doesn’t have the power to remove members for justified reasons as outlined in the Bill.

When this Commission was established last year, there were no guiding principles or code of conduct, including standards of public communications on social media. Also, there was no mechanism created for the Attorney General to remove a member if they violated the code of conduct. HB 809 fills this vacuum. It will give the Attorney General the authority to suspend or remove a member for misconduct, incompetence, neglect of duties, or any other cause deemed reasonable. Members must hold themselves to the highest level of accountability and integrity.

If they no longer represent the best interest of the group, the Attorney General must have the ability to remove them. For this reason, we ask for a favorable report on House Bill 809.



**Testimony in SUPPORT of *Senate Bill 753* –
*Public Safety – Firearm Background Checks, Victim Notification, and the
Maryland State Police Gun Center*
Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 27, 2024**

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 organizations and synagogues throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, and pluralism. We work tirelessly to advocate for our social service agencies that serve the most vulnerable residents and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the Jewish and broader community.

Senate Bill 753 bill would require Maryland State Police and/or regulated firearm dealers to notify the State Police Gun Center of a background check denial. The State Police Gun Center will then notify the local law enforcement agency within 24 hours, and that agency would then be responsible for notifying any victim of domestic violence of the background check denial if it is based on a prohibited person pursuant to an order of protection or violation of a protective order. In this way, victims can be informed of their abuser’s potential intentions and take necessary precautions.

In 2022, a requirement was placed on the FBI to notify local law enforcement when a prohibited person attempts to legally purchase a firearm and fails the background check. Maryland conducts some of its own background checks, and the federal requirement does not apply to Maryland State Police. Though this system of notification is helpful for law enforcement to be “in the loop,” it does nothing to help victims of domestic abuse to be aware of the potential intentions of their abuser.

The JCRC has a long tradition of supporting victims of domestic violence. We advocate on behalf of JCADA which empowers the people they serve by providing information regarding their options and rights. This Bill would serve as a mechanism to help them regain their sense of power and control after physical, sexual, psychological, or financial abuse. By providing survivors with the ability to take back some control, we are empowering them. For these reasons, we ask for a favorable report on Senate Bill 753.



**Testimony in SUPPORT of *House Bill 1058* –
Education - Curriculum Standards – Antihate and Holocaust Education
(Educate to Stop the Hate Act) –
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 23, 2024**

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 organizations and synagogues throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The JCRC is strongly committed to cultivating a society based on freedom, justice, and pluralism. We work throughout the region to advocate for our agencies that serve the most vulnerable residents and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the Jewish community and all Marylanders.

House Bill 1058 requires that the State Board of Education develop curriculum standards and resources for antihate and Holocaust education by January 1, 2025. The Bill applies to elementary, middle, and high school classrooms in all public and nonpublic schools that receive state funding. Additionally, the curriculum would include utilizing historical contexts that have led to contemporary racism and prejudice and the Holocaust. It also will revise the high school history framework to include the contributions of historically disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups.

We are living in a time of heightened hate where every marginalized community seems to be under attack. The spike in racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, and anti-Asian hate is unprecedented. House Bill 1058 is a critical piece of legislation to combat such hatred. Students of all ages need to understand history, including bigotry and prejudice, so that horrific events of the past - like the Holocaust - will never be repeated. In the last few months, the Jewish community has seen a 361% increase in antisemitic incidents compared to the same period a year ago. At the JCRC, it seems like a week doesn't go by without a call about vandalism at a synagogue, bullying on a playground, or a swastika found on a school desk. It's unacceptable and has to be addressed.

The Educate to Stop the Hate Act is not a panacea, but it certainly is a necessary step to help stem the tide and fight back against the harmful impact of hatred which undermines the very fabric of our society. HB 1058 is an opportunity to attack all forms of hatred. It's an opportunity we can't afford to miss. For these reasons, we ask for a favorable report on HB 1058.

