

Maryland Jewish Advocacy DAY 2021



Confronting Hate and Keeping Our Communities Safe

Last session we were able to achieve major legislative accomplishments in the fight against hate in Maryland. But there is still work to be done. Hate and bias incidents have continued to steadily increase across the United States. Many of these incidents stem from a lack of understanding of just how powerful hate symbols and speech are. Whether these incidents are targeted against people because of their religion, skin-tone, or other protected groups, we must remain vigilant against these hate motivated incidents. The state can help make those communities most affected safer by updating our laws to require offenders to be properly educated on the communities they have hurt, and to finally rid Maryland's public schools of hate symbols.

Bills We Are Advocating For

House Bill 418 (HB418) – County Boards of Education – Symbols of Hate Crimes – Policy (Delegate Michele Guyton)

This bill would require each county board of education to adopt a policy prohibiting the use or display of hate symbols such as a swastikas or the confederate flag. This bill would ensure these symbols are no longer displayed on clothing, bags, or other materials carried by students. This policy has already been adopted by Howard and Carroll County Public Schools and is being considered by other jurisdictions. HB418 would ensure a consistent policy is set in every county in a timely matter. Students need to understand true impact of just how hurtful these symbols are, and how they have no place in our society.

Senate Bill 220 / House Bill 128 (SB220/HB128) Criminal Law – Hate Crimes – Protected Groups and Penalties (Senator Shelly Hettleman and Delegate Vaughn Stewart)

This bill would allow a court to require an individual who is convicted of a hate crime to undergo an antibias education program to be developed by the University System of Maryland. It also expands the protected classes of the hate crime statute to explicitly include gender-related identity.

Senate Bill 864 / House Bill 1227 (SB864/HB1227) Public Safety – Taskforce on Preventing and Countering Domestic Terrorism (Senator Shelly Hettleman and Delegate Sandy Rosenberg)

This bill would establish the Task Force on Preventing and Countering Domestic Terrorism. The taskforce would study ways the state can prevent domestic terrorism, hate, and other forms of extremism. After studying this issue, the taskforce would then make policy recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly.

Why are these Bills Good for Maryland and the Jewish Community?

In 2017 Maryland's Jewish community faced a frightening string of bomb threats against its community centers, places of worship, and schools. These incidents were only an unfortunate beginning of a larger nationwide trend of violent antisemitic incidents and attacks. Pittsburgh, Poway, Monsey, and Jersey City all followed. Reports of antisemitic incidents are reported almost daily in the United States, and according to the Antidefamation League, 2019 saw the highest level of antisemitic incidents since tracking began. According to the 2019 State of Maryland Hate/Bias Report authored by the Maryland State Police, the year closed out a decade of increasing hate/bias incidents across the state. 2019 saw a 2.7% increase in these incidents. This continuing sharp rise affected a geographically and demographically diverse array of Marylanders, with most of these incidents being targeted toward African Americans and Jews. These statistics are even more troubling when considering how many hate/bias incidents go unreported due to fear or intimidation of the targeted groups or individuals.

Through the work of the Baltimore Community Task Force on Antisemitism, interfaith programming, Holocaust education, and teen engagement, the Baltimore Jewish Council works year-round to fight against Antisemitism. However, it will require a continued state-wide effort to address this troubling rise in hate and bigotry so that all Marylanders can feel safe in their own communities.

What Can Be Done?

Ask your legislators to support each of these bills. Have you felt less safe in your community or place of worship? Have you or someone you know ever been the victim of a hate crime or bias incident? Share your story if you feel comfortable.