

State of Maryland

Commission on Civil Rights

“Our vision is to have a State that is free from any trace of unlawful discrimination.”



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January 29, 2020

Senate Bill 161 - Crimes – Hate Crimes – Use of an Item or a Symbol to Threaten or Intimidate Position: Support

Dear Chairperson Smith, Vice Chairperson Waldstreicher, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (“MCCR”; “The Commission”) is the State agency responsible for the enforcement of laws prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, and state contracts based upon race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, and physical and mental disability.

Senate Bill 161 prohibits a person from placing or inscribing an item or symbol, including an actual or depicted noose or swastika, on the property of another without authorization, with the intent to threaten or intimidate any person or group of persons. Violators are guilty of a misdemeanor, punishable by imprisonment for up to three years and/or a \$5,000 maximum fine.

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, there are at least 1,020 hate groups operating in the United States – 21 of which are in Maryland. Meanwhile, the Maryland State Police reported that in 2018, 375 reports of alleged acts of hate and bias were filed across the State, down from the 398 reported in 2017 and up from 295 in 2016. In 2018, Chesapeake High School and Crofton Middle School in Anne Arundel County were two sites where nooses were hung on school grounds. Acts of hate and bias are on the rise, and often involve the use of symbols being placed or inscribed with the malicious intent to intimidate and harm our fellow Marylanders. Senate Bill 161 sends a clear message that such acts have no place in our State.

For these reasons, the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights urges the committee to vote favorably on SB161.