



Testimony in SUPPORT of *House Bill 128 – Criminal Law – Hate Crimes – Protected Groups and Penalties*
House Judiciary Committee
January 26, 2021

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 throughout the entire Greater Washington area to advocate for our agencies that serve the most vulnerable residents, support our Jewish day schools and community centers, and to campaign for important policy interests on behalf of the entire Jewish community.

In the Talmud (Shabbat 31a), Judaism teaches us that we should respect the rights of others, “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor.” We are also taught in the Torah about the sanctity of life, that every human being is “created in the image of G-d,” (Genesis 1:27). Understanding these core principles, as well as our own people’s painful history of exclusion, discrimination and genocidal violence, the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington strongly advocates for policies that oppose discrimination in all its forms as to race, color, religion or creed, sex, age, ancestry or national origin, marital status, physical or mental illnesses or chronic conditions, physical, intellectual and cognitive disabilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, or genetic information. Too, we have a long history of supporting policy measures that further strengthen Maryland’s hate crime laws.

House Bill 128 –Criminal Law—Hate Crimes-Protected Groups and Penalties authorizes a sentencing court to order a person convicted of a hate crime to complete an anti-bias education program. There is clearly a need for this type of education for those who have committed hate crimes and to prevent the further manifestation of hate in our society, since polarization, anti-Semitism, racism and bigotry are at historic levels in our nation. Those who have committed hate crimes deserve the opportunity to be educated about the irrationality of group-based hatred, the harm it causes and to understand that respect for people of all backgrounds and creating communities that are inclusive must be a goal of American society. We also support the language in the bill that alters the context of sexual orientation so as to include gender expression. We do not fully understand the inclusion of ‘age’ as a characteristic to be protected but would rely on the committee’s judgement whether or to include that.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable vote on HB 128. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments in support of this proposed legislation.