



**Testimony in SUPPORT of *House Bill 452 – Hate Crimes – Civil Remedy***  
**Judiciary Committee**  
**February 24, 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.

Over the past few years, we have continued to see an increase in hate crimes, hate incidents, and even threats motivated by hate. Maryland has not been immune to this; public and private schools, synagogues, churches, mosques and other local institutions have been tagged with swastikas and hate filled messages both outside and inside the buildings. In 2019, we saw another huge uptick of hate incidents and threats, including bomb threats, hate graffiti, and more targeted against individual members of our community and Jewish institutions. Some of these incidents have been physical harm, while others have caused severe emotional and psychological harm.

According to the Anti-Defamation League, criminal activity motivated by bias is different from other criminal conduct. These crimes occur because of the perpetrator's bias or hatred against the victim on the basis of their actual or perceived status. Specifically, the victim's race, religion, national origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability is the reason for the crime. If that bias did not exist, likely no crime would occur at all.

House Bill 452 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 person or persons 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. HB 452 also includes punitive damages awarded to the Attorney General bringing the civil action, and reasonable attorney's fees and court costs to the prevailing plaintiff or the Attorney General. For these reasons, we ask this committee to give a favorable report on HB 452.

