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WRITTEN TESTIMONY

House Bill 418 – County Boards of Education – Symbols of Hate – Policy

Ways and Means Committee

February 5, 2021

SUPPORT

Background: House Bill 418 (HB418) would require each county board of education to adopt a policy prohibiting the use or display of hate symbols such as a swastika or the confederate flag.

Written Comments: The Baltimore Jewish Council (BJC) represents the Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore and all of its agencies. The BJC actively works against antisemitism and all forms of hate, including in the classroom. Students need to understand the power and meaning of hate symbols and how harmful they are to their peers. HB 418 would ensure that hate symbols are no longer displayed on clothing, bags, or other materials carried by students. Whether the students displaying them realize it, these symbols have only one meaning in today's society, and that is one of hatred and intolerance. For many students the swastika evokes images of Kristallnacht and a confederate flag symbolizes a cause that advocated for slavery and segregation. Nine school systems in Maryland including Montgomery, Howard, and St. Mary's Counties have already implemented restrictions on hate symbols in their schools and it is time we rid all Maryland Public Schools of these hateful and hurtful symbols.

We have long been concerned about the recent rise in hate/bias incidents in Maryland and the damaging effect that they could be having on our young people. 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 incidents being targeted toward African Americans and Jews. So many of these incidents stem from a lack of understanding that is only perpetuated by the open display of hate symbols. We must send the message that they have no place in our state's schools.

With this in mind, the Baltimore Jewish Council respectfully urges a favorable report of HB418.

The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of The Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.

BALTIMORE JEWISH COUNCIL

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Member of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs

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