



Maryland General Assembly
House Appropriations Committee
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ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) is pleased to submit this testimony in **support of HB 898, Maryland Department of Emergency Management - Office of Domestic Terrorism Response**, a bill that would establish the Office of Domestic Terrorism Response within the Maryland Department of Emergency Management to prepare for and prevent domestic terrorism activities, and build infrastructure for the Office to work with federal, state, and local agencies as well as the General Assembly.

Since 1913, the mission of ADL (the “Anti-Defamation League”) has been to “stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” For decades, one of the most important ways in which ADL has fought against bigotry and antisemitism has been by investigating extremist threats across the ideological spectrum, producing research to inform the public of the scope of the threat, and working with law enforcement, educators, the tech industry and elected leaders to promote best practices that can effectively address and counter threats to communities.

As ADL has said time and time again, extremists must be taken at their word. Volatile rhetoric online bleeds into explicit calls to violence. The January 6, 2021 attack of the U.S. Capitol was an assault on our democracy, and many were roused to violence that day as a result of weeks and months and years of incitement. It was and continues to be part of an escalating pattern that has been roiling for a long time. This requires vigilance and commitment from all of us to interrupt.

While it is impossible to say with absolute certainty what lies ahead, we know that white supremacists and some other extremists, including anti-Muslim extremists, anti-immigrant extremists and antisemites, are driven by conspiracy theories as well as manufactured fears around demographic change. Militia and other anti-government groups may also be very active in the next few years. The militia movement has historically derived much of its energy and vitality from its rage towards the federal government.

Antisemitism will also likely continue to be a central part of the conspiratorial views that fuel right-wing violence, as it has been for so long. It is crucial to recognize not only the threat to Jews and Jewish institutions this poses, but also both the foundational and animating impetus it gives to violent extremism, whatever its targets. And it is also vitally important to understand the role that antisemitic conspiracies play in the wider threat to our democracy. Antisemitism isn't just bigotry directed toward Jews; it uses that hatred and bigotry against the Jewish community to undermine democratic practices by framing democracy as a conspiracy, as Eric

Ward of the Western States Center notes, “rather than as a tool of empowerment or a functional tool of governance. In other words, the more people buy into antisemitism and its understanding of the world, the more they lose faith in democracy.”

Unfortunately, those who perpetrated the January 6th attack, and those who continue to pose a threat to our democracy, will not readily abandon their principles, nor will those who support acts of domestic terrorism from afar. We cannot expect there to be a change unless we change something about our approach. The trauma of January 6th must not be in vain. This legislation is an important contribution to that effort.

ADL believes we need a whole-of-government approach to address this threat. We strongly recommend urgent action to prevent and counter domestic violent extremism, which is why we support legislation like **HB 898**. Creating an Office specifically set up for the purpose of developing strategies and resources to prepare for, prevent, and recover from domestic terrorism activities, in consultation with academic and public health professionals, is vital in this fight. This also fits within the framework that ADL has created — the **PROTECT** plan — a comprehensive, seven-part plan to mitigate the threat posed by domestic extremism and domestic terrorism while protecting civil rights and civil liberties. Together, focusing on these seven categories can have an immediate and deeply significant impact in preventing and countering domestic terrorism— more so than any one action, policy, or law— and can do so while protecting civil rights and liberties and ensuring that government overreach does not harm the same vulnerable people and communities that these extremists target. Our suggestions come under these seven areas:

- P Prioritize Preventing and Countering Domestic Terrorism**
- R Resource According to the Threat**
- O Oppose Extremists in Government Service**
- T Take Public Health and Other Domestic Terrorism Prevention Measures**
- E End the Complicity of Social Media in Facilitating Extremism**
- C Create an Independent Clearinghouse for Online Extremist Content**
- T Target Foreign White Supremacist Terrorist Groups for Sanctions**

For all these reasons, we accordingly urge the House Appropriations Committee to give HB 898 a favorable report.