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## WRITTEN TESTIMONY

### House Bill 45 – Crimes – Mitigation and Defense – Religious Beliefs, Disability, or Homelessness

### Judiciary Committee

January 25, 2022

### SUPPORT

**Background:** House Bill 45 (HB45) would expand existing law to state that the discovery of another person's religious beliefs, disability, or homelessness status, whether or not accurate, is not a defense or mitigating factor for assault, manslaughter, or murder.

**Written Comments:** This bill will unequivocally state that Maryland does not condone using hate as a defense for violent crime. We know that this defense is completely baseless and stems from pure hate. The Baltimore Jewish Council and Maryland's Jewish community are concerned about the recent rise in hate/bias incidents in Maryland and the damaging effect that is having on our communities. These incidents are impacting not just Jewish communities, but those of many of our other faith partners. According to the 2019 State of Maryland Hate/Bias Report authored by the Maryland State Police, there has been a gradual increase in hate/bias incidents over the past decade. 2019 saw the second-largest number of incidents reported in the last 10 years. Incidents were reported in a majority of jurisdictions with Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Howard, Montgomery, and Prince George's counties reporting the most incidents. These reported incidents targeted both individuals and some of our most vital arenas for community engagement, including schools, community centers, and places of worship. No place, person, place or part of our state is immune to these kinds of hateful incidents.

Last year the General Assembly ensured that defendants cannot use their victim's race, color, national origin, sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation as a defense for committing violent crime. We need to expand this to include religious beliefs, disability, and homelessness status so that hate is not an excuse.

With this in mind, the Baltimore Jewish Council urges a favorable report of HB45

*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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