

Maryland Jewish Advocacy

DAY & RECEPTION 2018



What is House Bill 246 (HB246) – Hate Crimes – Property – Damaging or Threatening to Damage

HB246, sponsored by Delegate Sandy Rosenberg, would expand current law regarding hate crimes to include threats and attempts to damage, deface or destroy property based on race, religion, gender, ethnic identification, sexual orientation, disability, homelessness or nationality. The current state law *only* addresses real damage, not threats or attempts. In addition to this expansion, the bill would also *increase* the penalty for such acts to a misdemeanor, resulting in imprisonment not exceeding 5 years, or a fine not exceeding \$10,000, or both. To address the underlying cause of the crime, the court may also require upon release that the perpetrator attend educational classes or perform community service related to the group targeted by the crime. A Senate version of HB246 will be crossfiled by Senator Bobby Zirkin.

Why is HB246 Good for Maryland?

HB246 aims to directly address the recent rise in hate/bias incidents in Maryland and the damaging effect they are having on our local communities. According to the 2016 State of Maryland Hate/Bias Report authored by the Maryland State Police, reported hate crimes rose by 40% from 2015 to 2016. This sharp rise affected a geographically and demographically diverse array of Marylanders with increases seen in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Dorchester, Frederick, Harford, Howard, Montgomery, and Somerset counties, as well as Baltimore City. These reported incidents not only targeted individuals, but attacked some of our state's most vital arenas for community engagement, including schools, community centers, and places of worship.

The report reveals that the majority of these hate incidents involved vandalism or verbal threats. Though vandalism is addressed in current state hate crime laws, the existing law fails to address *threats or attempts* to deface, damage, or destroy property. This gap in the law, combined with the sharp increase in overall incidents, has left many Marylanders feeling unsafe in their own neighborhoods. HB246 seeks to address this fear and restore community security by placing harsher penalties upon convicted perpetrators and introducing a rehabilitative aspect to reduce the chance of repeat offenses by the same perpetrator.

How Does HB246 Impact the Jewish Community?

Last year, Maryland's Jewish community faced a frightening string of bomb threats against its community centers, places of worship, and schools. These incidents were only one part of a larger trend. In 2016, the Jewish community was the 2nd most common target of hate/bias incidents reported to the Maryland State Police, with anti-Semitic incidents accounting for 18.6% of reported crimes. These statistics are even more troubling when considering how many hate crimes go unreported due to fear or intimidation of the targeted groups or individuals. The Baltimore Jewish Council works year-round to fight against anti-Semitism through interfaith programming, Holocaust education, and teen engagement, but it will require a uniform, state-wide effort to address this troubling rise in hate and bigotry so that *all* Marylanders can feel safe in their own communities.

What Can Be Done?

Tell your legislator that you support HB246 – *Hate Crimes – Property – Damaging or Threatening to Damage*.