Confronting Hate and Keeping Our Communities Safe

In 2018, personal attacks motivated by bias or prejudice reached a 16-year national high. In recent years, 61 percent of these hateful incidents were violent assaults on individuals. Other crimes ranged from property damage to mass shootings and stabbings. Whether these incidents are targeted against people because of their religion, skin-tone or political beliefs, we must remain vigilant against these appalling hate motivated incidents. The state can help make these affected communities safer by funding security for schools and religious institutions at-risk of hate crimes, by updating our laws and by requiring police officers to be trained properly on how to address these unique crimes.

Bills and Funding We Are Advocating For

Operating Budget - $5 Million for the Security for Schools, Childcare Centers and Religious Institutions at Risk of Hate Crimes

A total of $5 million has been designated in the Governor’s proposed FY21 budget for security infrastructure upgrades and personnel for Schools, Childcare Centers and Places of Worship at Risk of Hate Crimes. This includes $2 million for schools and childcare centers in the Maryland Center for School Safety’s budget. $3 million is included for the Governor’s Office of Crime Control and Prevention for the safety of religious institutions.

Senate Bill 161/House Bill 5 (SB161/HB5) – Crimes - Hate Crimes - Use of an Item or a Symbol to Threaten or Intimidate (Senator Elfreth and Delegate Chang)

This bill would expand current law regarding hate crimes to include prohibiting someone from placing or inscribing an item or symbol, including an actual or depicted Noose or Swastika, without the express permission of the owner of the building or property, the owner’s agent, or a lawful occupant, with the intent to threaten or intimidate any person or group of persons.

Senate Bill 633/House Bill 541 (SB633/HB541) Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission - Training Requirements - Hate Crimes (Senator Waldstreicher and Delegate Lopez)

This bill would ensure that all police officers in Maryland are properly trained on how to respond to hate crimes. This bill lays out training standards for all new officers and those currently serving. Such guidelines would include training every three years on the criminal laws concerning hate crimes, the appropriate treatment of victims of hate crimes, and the procedures for proper reporting.
House Bill 1164 (HB1164) Criminal Law – Domestic Terrorism (Delegate Rosenberg)

This bill defines and criminalizes Domestic Terrorism, classifying it as a felony. It is defined as a crime committed with the intent to injure or kill another while attempting to intimidate the population or influence government policy. Additionally, this bill requires the Governor’s Office of Homeland Security to report on the State’s efforts to detect and prevent acts of Domestic Terrorism.

Why are these Bills Good for Maryland and the Jewish Community?

In 2017 Maryland’s Jewish community faced a frightening string of bomb threats against its community centers, places of worship, and schools. These incidents were only an unfortunate beginning of a larger nationwide trend of violent Antisemitic incidents and attacks. Pittsburgh, Poway, Monsey, and Jersey City all followed. According to the 2018 State of Maryland Hate/Bias Report authored by the Maryland State Police, we have seen a sharp increase in hate/bias incidents over the past decade. 2018 experienced the second-largest number of incidents in the last 10 years. This continuing sharp rise affected a geographically and demographically diverse array of Marylanders, with most of these incidents being targeted toward African Americans and Jews. 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 Antisemitism through interfaith programming, Holocaust education, and teen engagement, but it will require a 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 legislators to support each of these bills and funding sources. Have you felt less safe in your community or place of worship? Have you or someone you know ever been the victim of a hate crime or bias incident? Share your story if you feel comfortable.