



Montgomery County Delegation

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ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) is pleased to submit this testimony in **support of MC 22-24 – Montgomery County Public Schools – School Personnel Training – Religious Discrimination Prevention**. This bill will require Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) to require training for school personnel on the prevention of antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of religious discrimination. It will impose on MCPS the importance of providing more comprehensive teacher training and teaching materials in K-12 schools as we see unprecedented levels of hate crimes and bias incidents impacting our faith-based communities.

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.” As a leading anti-hate organization, 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, and working with law enforcement, educators, the tech industry, and elected leaders to promote best practices to effectively address and counter these threats. Further, ADL conducts an annual *Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents*, which is widely used by law enforcement, educational institutions, elected officials, and the community at-large to not only understand how to respond to antisemitic incidents, but how to create change.

At a time of rising antisemitism across the country, including in Montgomery County and the entire state of Maryland, this bill sends a clear message that our community is committed to ensuring that schools have the tools they need to push back against these trends. The need for robust training for our educators in K-12 schools could not be more urgent. When MCPS faculty do not understand the history of antisemitism and how it manifests in modern day, or the elements leading to these incidents, they cannot fully grasp the significance of bias and bigotry, or the lasting impact that hateful words and conduct can have on the community at large.

Therefore, this bill is a measure ADL wholeheartedly supports and sees as a critically important step in the right direction.

Since October 7, U.S. antisemitic incidents have skyrocketed, reaching the highest point of any three-month period since ADL began tracking in 1979, according to preliminary data. Between October 7, 2023, and January 7, 2024, ADL recorded **a total of 3,283 antisemitic incidents** across the United States, representing a **361-percent increase** compared to the same period one year prior, which saw 712 incidents. The preliminary three-month tally is higher than the total number of antisemitic incidents tracked in any year in the last decade, except for calendar year 2022, when the total number of incidents reached a historic high of 3,697.

Since Oct. 7, there’s been an average of nearly 34 antisemitic incidents per day, putting 2023 on track to be the highest year for antisemitic acts against Jews since ADL started tracking this data

in the late 1970s. The American Jewish community is facing a threat level that's now unprecedented in modern history. It's shocking that we've recorded more antisemitic acts in three months than we usually would in an entire year. In this difficult moment, antisemitism is spreading and mutating in alarming ways. This onslaught of hate includes a dramatic increase in fake bomb threats that disrupt services at synagogues and put communities on edge across the country.

This data also confirms what Jewish communities have seen firsthand across the country – and it corresponds with a notable rise in antisemitic attitudes. We're seeing a mainstreaming and a normalization of antisemitism, the likes of which have not been seen in this country for generations. In Maryland, 109 antisemitic incidents were reported in 2022, a 98 percent increase from the 55 incidents in 2021, and a 132 percent increase from the 47 incidents reported in 2020. Maryland registered with the 10th highest number of antisemitic incidents reported in the country for 2022. And of these numbers close to 60 percent occurred in Montgomery County with many in our K-12 schools. The raw data we are analyzing shows both the county and the state of Maryland poised to report even higher for our 2023 audit of antisemitic incidents.

In 2022, there were 494 antisemitic incidents tabulated in non-Jewish schools (mostly public schools). This is a 49-percent increase from the 331 incidents in 2021. Of the 494 K-12 school incidents, 257 were incidents of harassment, 232 were incidents of vandalism and five were assaults. School-based harassment incidents in 2022 included one-off incidents such as when one student told another, "Ew Jew. Why don't you kill yourself," or when a student shouted in the middle of a math class, "If anyone celebrates Yom Kippur today, you can die!" Harassment incidents included recurrent antisemitic bullying, such as classmates taunting Jewish students with Holocaust jokes and references.

The 232 incidents of antisemitic vandalism in K-12 schools in 2022 represent a 53 percent increase from the 152 incidents tabulated in 2021. Of the 232 vandalism cases recorded, swastikas were present in 88 percent of K-12 school vandalism cases (205 incidents). Vandalism incidents included messages such as "Kill all Jews," "6M Oven," "Hitler was right" and "Jews not welcome." Given the insidious nature of bullying, compounded by the fact that many children may not feel empowered to report their experiences, it is likely that the actual number of school-based antisemitic incidents was significantly higher than the data reported in the Audit.

These incidents did not take place in a vacuum. They come at a time of rising bigotry, the emboldening of hate groups, and a resurgence of Holocaust denialism—a challenge that has existed on the fringes for many years, but in recent years has encroached on the mainstream of our politics and discourse. When our MCPS faculty are not prepared to work with students or respond to parents and guardians, it can cause tremendous harm to the school community of those impacted by the hate incidents. Education is therefore key to combating hate in all its forms. By learning about the history of antisemitism, anti-Muslim hate, or other forms of religious discrimination, and how we are seeing it evident today, educators will have the opportunity to explore how stereotypes, prejudice, and religious and ethnic hatred can escalate to atrocity.

ADL is incredibly proud of the education work we have been doing together in partnership with the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (JCRC). In lockstep, we have been providing over the past few years in-depth professional development training on antisemitism. JCRC and ADL created a two-day professional development series for K-12 educators and administrators to increase awareness of the Jewish experience and educate participants about the history and contemporary manifestations of antisemitism. On day one of these sessions, participants deepen their understanding of Jewish life, explore “classic” antisemitic tropes and the modern-day manifestations of antisemitism. Further, they develop an understanding of the varied experiences of Jewish people, explore how antisemitism impacts Jewish youth, explore how antisemitism manifests today, and understand how they can use their collective voice for change.

Session two is dedicated to responding to antisemitism where there is a focus on how participants can identify antisemitism in the community and respond effectively. We provide time and reflection for how to take personal action to combat antisemitism as an individual and organization. Participants increase their awareness of incidents of antisemitism in their environment, improve their ability to address specific incidents of antisemitism and bias and to select appropriate responses, and develop and use a variety of preventive and reactive responses to challenge incidents of antisemitism and bias.

In addition to the antisemitism training, ADL has education tools and resources on our website to help your schools, communities and society be more respectful, inclusive and equitable. We provide anti-bias education through professional learning, educational programs, resources and strategies for educators both through online self-paced programs and in-person professional development. We work in partnership with schools, organizations and communities to design and deliver anti-bias education as we believe that when we learn, as individuals, how to challenge bias, discrimination and hate – together, we have the capacity to foster equity and inclusion.

In recent months, as ADL has tracked a drastic increase in antisemitic incidents, we have also seen an uptick of incidents of anti-Muslim attacks in various communities. Therefore, ADL in November released a guide called “Anti-Muslim Bias and Acting as an Ally.” This guide focuses on what we call a Table Talk Conversation and is geared towards age 11 and up. It’s a way for educators, families, and anyone else interested, to learn about anti-Muslim as a form of religious bias and a form of racism, and how to respond effectively to it.

Behind every hate crime statistic, there is a person, a family, a community – dealing with the unimaginable. Hate crimes and bias incidents cause a distinct type of harm that can have a lasting, immeasurable impact. This is because they target people due to their protected, immutable characteristics – race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, sex, gender, gender identity, disability – things about a person that are central to identity and cannot be changed. ADL is proud to be a leading anti-hate organization that has been able to help thousands of people who report hate and bias incidents to us.

We feel very strongly that it is imperative to disrupt the cycle of hate with education, starting with those who are leading our school buildings and classrooms. **MC22-24** helps put this

conversation front and center and continue the good work that ADL and the JCRC have been focusing on in MCPS and several other area school districts. There is unfortunately no magic wand that we can wave to undo the irreparable harm that hate crimes or bias incidents cause. Yet here in Montgomery County, we can make sure that our policies are crafted in a way that will help stem the rising tide. We have an important obligation and unique opportunity to empower a new generation to learn from our past to build a safer, stronger, and more equitable society in the future.

We urge the Montgomery County Delegation to give MC22-24 a favorable report.