



**Virginia General Assembly**  
House of Delegates  
House Counties, Cities and Towns Subcommittee  
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Testimony of Meredith R. Weisel  
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ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) is pleased to submit this testimony in **support of HB 2352, A bill to amend and reenact § 15.2-908 of the Code of Virginia, relating to removal of hate symbol defacement**, as amended. This bill will help facilitate the removal of hateful vandalism intended to intimidate and/or harass individuals across the Commonwealth on the basis of their protected identity characteristics, sending a clear message that hate has no home in Virginia.

Since 1913, the mission of ADL has been to “stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” Over the past three decades, ADL has been recognized as a leading resource on effective responses to violent bigotry at both the state and federal level. We frequently assist in drafting model hate crime statutes for state legislatures, and we were also privileged to lead a broad coalition of civil rights, religious, educational, professional, law enforcement, and civic organizations working in support of the 2009 Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act (“HCPA”) for more than a decade.

Hate crime vandalism is unfortunately a serious concern in Virginia. Vandalism was the most common hate crime offense type in 2020, and the second most common hate crime offense type in 2021, according to the Crime in Virginia Report. Indeed, in 2020, of the 190 hate crimes documented in Virginia, 77 (or 41%) were vandalism-related. In 2021, of the 123 hate crimes documented in Virginia, 39 (or 32%) were vandalism-related. This data is consistent with ADL’s Audit of Antisemitic Incidents, which specifically tracks a broader set of incidents of vandalism, harassment and assault across the country. In 2021, ADL documented 46 antisemitic incidents in Virginia, 11 of which were vandalism-related.

Hateful vandalism incidents are intended to intimidate and terrorize not just the individual whose property is targeted, but entire communities. Their impact, therefore, cannot be measured solely in terms of dollars and cents. This was particularly true in the wake of the racist, antisemitic and anti-LGBTQ+ vandalism incident at the Food Lion in the South Riding Town Center last year – the impact of which reverberated across all of Loudoun County.

At a time when hate and extremism are on the rise, it is critical that Virginia residents and business owners, as well as localities, have the tools they need to address it. HB2352 will help ensure that localities are able to swiftly and expeditiously remove hate symbol defacement from public property, and the amendments to the bill show sensitivity to private property owners in the wake of these attacks, giving them the opportunity to conceal the unauthorized and unlawful vandalism before it is removed, and providing a mechanism by which tax dollars can be used to cover the costs of repair, instead of requiring property owners to bear that burden. We hope that localities, in passing and implementing ordinances pursuant to this proposed law, will allocate sufficient funding, as well as resources, to support property owners who are already facing trauma and harm due to the impact of the hateful graffiti on their property.

**We urge the House Counties, Cities and Towns Subcommittee to give HB 2352 (as amended) a favorable report.**