



HoCo JAG

Howard County Jewish Advocacy Group

Favorable with Amendments

House Bill 0014

Hearing Date: April 1, 2026

Submitted by the Howard County Jewish Advocacy Group

Before the Maryland Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee

Summary

House Bill 0014 ensures that Maryland school systems meet their obligations under federal civil rights law by requiring consistent tracking and reporting of bias-based bullying, harassment, and intimidation. Recent federal findings in Howard County demonstrate that absent such systems, schools may fail to identify and remedy hostile environments affecting protected student groups.

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice-Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Howard County Jewish Advocacy Group (HoCoJAG), we respectfully request a **favorable report on HB0014 with the amendments outlined below**.

A [recent investigation](#) by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) into the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) provides a clear and highly relevant example of the problem this bill is designed to address. OCR found that:

“...the evidence produced to date suggests that a hostile environment likely existed for Jewish students in the School System but because ... the School System did not assess whether any incidents reported to it ... created or contributed to a hostile environment ... the School System likely did not take steps necessary to redress any such hostile environment.”

This finding is not merely procedural—it is substantive. Incidents were occurring, but because they were not systematically evaluated as bias-based or assessed collectively, the school system failed to recognize the existence of a hostile environment.

This illustrates a critical failure mode:

- incidents are reported
- but not categorized as bias-based
- not aggregated across time or context
- and therefore not recognized as constituting a civil rights violation

Without structured tracking and analysis, even well-intentioned school systems can fail to meet their Title VI obligations.

The OCR findings are particularly instructive because they do not hinge on the absence of incidents—but rather on the failure to identify patterns and meaningfully assess them.

Antisemitism further complicates this problem. It is often expressed indirectly or in coded forms, including targeting students based on global events or identity-linked rhetoric. Without explicit categorization and tracking, such incidents are frequently misclassified or treated as isolated events rather than part of a broader pattern.

This is not a mandate to label or categorize students—it is a requirement to accurately identify and track incidents in order to meet existing civil rights obligations.

Available data reinforces the urgency. According to FBI hate crime data and Maryland reporting, Jews experience hate-bias incidents at the highest per-capita rate of any identifiable group, both in Maryland and nationally, despite representing a small percentage of the population. These patterns are consistent with the OCR’s findings and demonstrate that this is not an isolated issue.

Of particular concern, HCPSS did not respond to OCR’s findings by implementing a clear mechanism to track antisemitism as a distinct category in its reporting systems. This underscores the need for statewide standards to ensure consistency, transparency, and compliance across all school systems.

Concerns with Current Reporting Thresholds

While HB0014 is an important step forward, its effectiveness is limited by provisions that condition reporting on:

- a “substantial increase” in incidents, or
- a “disproportionate” level of incidents

These thresholds introduce subjectivity and create the risk that serious incidents will not be reported unless they meet undefined criteria.

More fundamentally, they reflect a flawed premise: civil rights compliance should not depend on whether harm reaches a particular volume or comparative threshold.

The OCR findings in Howard County demonstrate that failure occurs precisely when incidents are not consistently tracked and evaluated—regardless of whether they meet arbitrary thresholds.

Requested Amendments

To ensure that HB0014 fully addresses the issues identified in the OCR investigation, we respectfully request:

- Page 4, Line 23 – Delete “, IF”
- Page 4, Lines 24–28 – Delete (e)(3)(I) and (II)
- Page 5, Line 2 – Insert:
“, DISAGGREGATED BY THE MOTIVATING PERSONAL CHARACTERISTIC.”

These amendments ensure that:

- all bias-based incidents are captured
 - data is consistently categorized
 - and patterns can be identified before they escalate into systemic violations
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Conclusion

The OCR findings in Howard County provide a clear, real-world example of how gaps in tracking and analysis can result in failure to protect students under federal civil rights law.

HB0014 directly addresses this gap. With the proposed amendments, it will ensure that Maryland school systems:

- identify bias-based incidents accurately
- recognize patterns early
- and take appropriate corrective action

Without consistent data, there is no accountability. Without accountability, there is no effective protection.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge a **favorable report with amendments**—because civil rights protections are only meaningful when they are consistently enforced.

Respectfully submitted,

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