



HoCo JAG

Howard County Jewish Advocacy Group

HB0661 – FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

Written Testimony: Favorable with Amendments

Hearing Date: March 17, 2026

Submitted by the Howard County Jewish Advocacy Group

Before the Maryland General Assembly Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

Dear Chair Wells, Vice-Chair Kerr, and Members of the Committee,

The Howard County Jewish Advocacy Group (HoCoJAG), representing Jewish residents and community members in Howard County, supports the goal of House Bill 661 (HB0661) to recognize the contributions of Muslim and Jewish Americans to Maryland’s civic and cultural life.

Our members strongly support recognizing those contributions. However, several provisions of the bill should be amended to ensure that the legislation relies on reliable demographic data and that these commemorations promote civic unity and mutual respect.

1. Legislative Findings in the Preamble Should Be Accurate

The bill’s preamble states that “over 350,000 Muslim Marylanders currently reside in the State” and includes similar demographic assertions regarding Jewish Marylanders. These figures do not appear to correspond to commonly cited demographic estimates derived from authoritative research.

Because the U.S. Census does not collect data on religious affiliation, estimates of religious populations must be derived from survey research and demographic modeling. When demographic claims are included in statutory language, they should rely on transparent and widely recognized sources such as the Pew Research Center, Gallup, or other established research institutions.

Recognizing the contributions of Muslim Americans and Jewish Americans to Maryland is entirely appropriate. However, embedding specific population estimates in legislative findings—particularly where reliable data sources vary—risks creating unnecessary controversy and detracting from the bill’s intended purpose.

For example:

- According to Pew Research, approximately 4% of adults in Maryland identify as Muslim. ([Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Study](#))
- Applied to Maryland's population of roughly 6.2 million residents, this suggests a Muslim population closer to 200,000–250,000 individuals, depending on assumptions regarding household composition.
- Other demographic estimates place Maryland's Muslim population at approximately 189,000 residents ([World Population Review, Muslim Population by State – Maryland](#)).

Because religious affiliation is not measured by the U.S. Census and estimates vary depending on methodology, demographic figures regarding religious populations should generally not be embedded in statutory findings unless they are supported by clear and authoritative sources.

Suggested Amendment

To address this concern, the Committee may wish to amend the preamble to remove the demographic claims regarding both Muslim and Jewish Marylanders.

Proposed language:

“WHEREAS, Muslim Americans and Jewish Americans have made important civic, cultural, educational, and economic contributions to the State of Maryland;”

This change preserves the bill's purpose while avoiding reliance on uncertain demographic estimates. Ensuring that the bill's legislative findings are accurate will help keep the focus of these commemorations on education and mutual respect rather than on disputed claims.

2. Commemorative Observances Should Promote Civic Unity

HB0661 encourages educational institutions, government agencies, and community organizations to observe these commemorative months through educational programs and activities. This intent is constructive. However, in the current social climate it is important that state-recognized commemorations not become platforms for inflaming religious or ethnic tensions.

Maryland has experienced a troubling rise in antisemitic incidents in recent years. According to data available through the [FBI Crime Data Explorer](#) for the recent two-year period, anti-Jewish incidents accounted for approximately 18.4% of all reported hate-bias incidents in Maryland, despite Jews comprising less than 4% of the State's population. By comparison, anti-Black incidents accounted for approximately 32.4% of reported incidents, while Black residents comprise roughly 31.6% of Maryland's population. These figures illustrate that antisemitism remains a serious and disproportionate concern in Maryland.

Muslim Americans have likewise faced discrimination and bias, and efforts to combat hatred against any community should be supported. For that reason, state-recognized commemorations should emphasize education, cultural recognition, and mutual respect, rather than becoming vehicles for political activism or messaging that could deepen divisions among communities.

Ensuring that commemorative observances are conducted in a manner that promotes understanding and respect would strengthen the bill's goal of celebrating Maryland's diverse communities.

3. Balanced Recognition of Communities

HB0661 commendably recognizes both Muslim Americans and Jewish Americans within the same legislation. This balanced approach reflects Maryland's longstanding commitment to religious pluralism and respect for diverse communities.

Ensuring that these observances remain educational, respectful, and inclusive will reinforce that tradition.

Recommended Amendment to Promote Unity

To ensure that commemorative observances strengthen civic cohesion, the following language could be added to the bill:

Proposed language (new subsection):

“Activities conducted in observance of Muslim American Heritage Month or Jewish American Heritage Month under this section shall promote education, cultural understanding, and mutual respect among the diverse communities of the State and may not be used to promote discrimination, hostility, or hatred toward any group based on religion, ethnicity, race, national origin, or shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics.”

This language would help ensure that these commemorations contribute to the goals of education and civic understanding rather than inadvertently exacerbating social tensions.

Conclusion

HB0661 addresses an important objective: recognizing the contributions of communities that have played meaningful roles in Maryland's civic and cultural life.

HoCoJAG respectfully recommends that the General Assembly:

- Remove unsupported demographic claims regarding the Muslim population in Maryland.
- Add language ensuring that commemorative observances promote mutual respect and are not used to promote discrimination or hostility toward any community.

With these improvements, HB0661 can more effectively fulfill its purpose of celebrating the diverse communities that contribute to the vitality of the State of Maryland.

For these reasons, HoCoJAG respectfully requests a **favorable report with the amendments described above.**

Respectfully submitted,

Howard County Jewish Advocacy Group

Attn: David Albert

5000 Thayer Center, Suite C

Oakland, MD 21550

david.albert@hocojag.org

301-970-9700

<https://www.hocojag.org>