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Howard County Jewish Advocacy Group

HB1184 - UNFAVORABLE

Written Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 1184

Hearing Date: March 11, 2026

Submitted by the Howard County Jewish Advocacy Group Before the Maryland General Assembly Judiciary Committee

Dear Chair Bartlett, Vice-Chair Davis, and Members of the Committee,

The Howard County Jewish Advocacy Group respectfully submits this written testimony in opposition to House Bill 1184.

The bill raises three serious constitutional and policy concerns. First, it intrudes into the federal government's exclusive authority over foreign affairs. Second, it threatens constitutionally protected charitable and associational activity by Maryland residents. Third, its vague prohibition on "aiding or abetting" certain activities creates substantial compliance risk for nonprofit organizations engaged in humanitarian and civic work.

While we unequivocally oppose violence against civilians anywhere in the world, HB1184 singles out Israel and attempts to regulate charitable activity connected to that country. In doing so, the bill raises serious constitutional concerns for Maryland nonprofits and may contribute to an already troubling climate of antisemitism in Maryland.

In short, HB1184 attempts to impose a state-level policy toward a foreign nation while exposing Maryland nonprofits to significant constitutional and legal risk.

1. Intrudes into Federal Foreign Affairs Authority

Foreign policy authority rests with the federal government. The Supreme Court has repeatedly invalidated state laws that attempt to regulate relations with foreign nations, including:

- [Zschernig v. Miller](#) (1968)
- [Crosby v. National Foreign Trade Council](#) (2000)
- [American Insurance Association v. Garamendi](#) (2003)

By singling out Israel and restricting activities connected to that country, HB1184 risks establishing a state-level foreign policy toward a specific nation—an area reserved exclusively to the federal government.

2. Threatens First Amendment Freedom of Association

The Supreme Court has repeatedly held that government actions deterring participation in advocacy organizations violate the First Amendment. Charitable giving and participation in nonprofit organizations constitute forms of protected expressive association under the First Amendment.

In [NAACP v. Alabama](#), the Court ruled that government measures discouraging participation in civil-society organizations create an unconstitutional chilling effect on freedom of association.

HB1184 threatens nonprofit organizations with penalties and regulatory consequences if they are found to support certain activities connected to Israel. Such provisions could deter Maryland residents from supporting lawful charities, thereby burdening constitutionally protected associational activity.

3. Uses Vague Language That Creates Legal Risk for Nonprofits

The bill’s prohibition on “aiding or abetting certain activity” lacks clear definition. As written, the statute could encompass:

- Humanitarian medical aid (e.g., Magen David Adom)
- Hospital funding (Hadassah hospitals, Israeli trauma centers, children’s hospitals)
- Educational, mental health, and anti-poverty programs (e.g., United Jewish Appeal)
- Joint Israeli-Palestinian peace NGOs

Statutes that impose penalties without clearly defining prohibited conduct raise serious concerns under constitutional vagueness doctrine.

4. Selectively Targets Israel

HB1184 singles out Israel and seeks to regulate charitable activity connected to that country. When a state restricts activities associated with a specific foreign nation, the legislation risks intruding into the federal government’s exclusive authority over foreign affairs.

Moreover, selectively burdening charities and donors associated with a particular country raises serious concerns about discriminatory treatment and the chilling of lawful humanitarian and civic activity.

This bill also reflects a broader pattern of legislative proposals targeting Israel introduced in recent sessions. Such proposals risk co-opting the Maryland General Assembly as a

platform for ideological foreign-policy advocacy rather than legislation addressing the needs and priorities of Maryland residents.

5. Risks Exacerbating Antisemitism in Maryland

Federal and state data show that antisemitic incidents have risen significantly in recent years. Although Jews constitute only a small percentage of both the U.S. population and Maryland’s population, [FBI hate-crime statistics](#) show that Jews experience hate-crime victimization at the highest per-capita rate of any identifiable group tracked in federal hate-crime data, a pattern also reflected in Maryland statistics.

Jewish institutions across Maryland—including synagogues, schools, and community centers—have been forced to significantly increase security in response to threats and harassment. In this environment, legislation that singles out Israel for unique restrictions can contribute to a climate in which hostility toward Jews increases or becomes normalized.

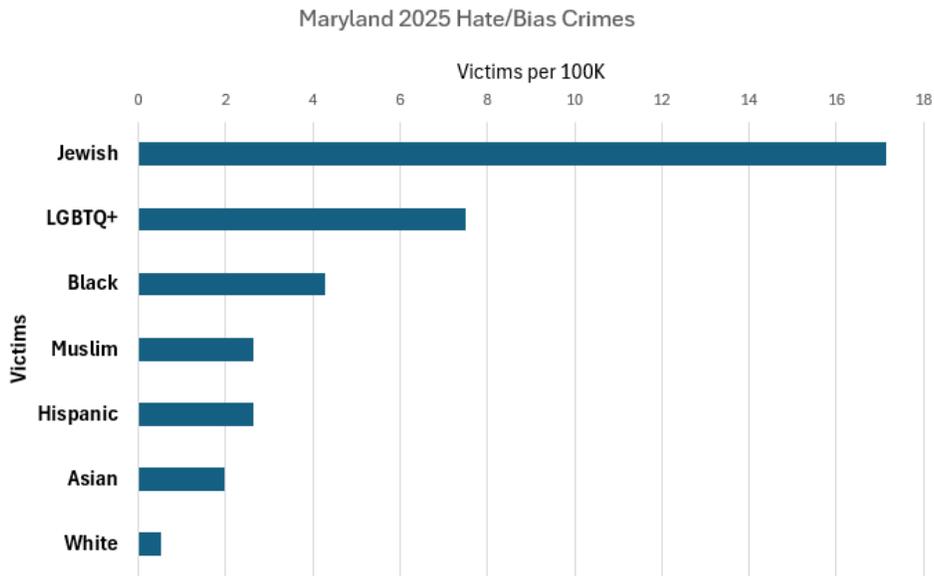


Figure 1. Source: [FBI Crime Data Explorer](#) (January 2025 - January 2026).

Conclusion

HB1184 intrudes directly into the federal government’s authority over foreign affairs, threatens constitutionally protected charitable and associational activity by Maryland residents, and imposes vague restrictions that create substantial compliance risk for nonprofit organizations. In addition, by singling out Israel for unique restrictions, the bill can contribute to an already rising climate of antisemitism at a time when Jewish communities in Maryland are experiencing historically elevated levels of antisemitic incidents.

For these reasons, the Howard County Jewish Advocacy Group respectfully urges the Committee to give House Bill 1184 an unfavorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

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