

2024 Baltimore Jewish Council End of Session Report

The 445th session of the Maryland General Assembly concluded on April 8, 2024. In the aftermath of the October 7th Massacre and the resulting war between Israel and Gaza, the BJC quickly shifted many of its priorities to ensure that hateful and damaging resolutions and legislation, focusing on issues in the Middle East rather than state policy, did not make it out of their assigned committees. With much of the focus on combatting hate, antisemitism, and anti-Israel rhetoric, this legislative session looked very different than it has in past years. Even so, the session produced many successful outcomes for our community.

CAPITAL BUDGET REQUEST

Governor Moore spent the months ahead of the legislative session warning that the state's budget would be incredibly tight this year. With threats of increasing taxes looming throughout the 90 days, the BJC is grateful to have received dollars for our requested projects and maintain level funding for our important community initiatives.

Renovations and Expansion of The Associated's Park Heights Campus (Baltimore City, District 41) **\$1,400,000 FY25**

The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore's Park Heights Campus Expansion and Renovation project previously received \$1 million in FY23 and \$500,000 in FY24. The Park Heights campus of The Associated has served for generations as a hub for Baltimore's Jewish community and Northwest Baltimore. The Associated's central headquarters will be moving from its current location on Mt. Royal Avenue up to the Park Heights campus. The full project is approximately \$20 million, with much of the cost raised through private philanthropy. **\$900,000 was allocated for this project in the operating budget, and \$500,000 was awarded in the capital budget, for a total of \$1.4M toward the project.**

Peggy and Yale Gordon Center For Performing Arts (Baltimore County, District 11A) **\$104,100 FY25**

Considered the premier performing arts venue in Baltimore County, the Gordon is located on the campus of the Rosenbloom Owings Mills JCC and serves as the centerpiece of the JCC's Center for Arts & Culture, which includes youth arts education and cultural programming for adults. This project's purpose is to provide environmental and accessibility improvements to the building, including upgrading to LED lighting fixtures and installing a gender-neutral bathroom in the lobby. **\$104,100 was allocated in the capital budget for this project.**

The Edward A. Myerberg Center (Baltimore City, District 41) **\$500,000 FY25**

Founded in 1976 as the Northwest Senior Center, The Edward A. Myerberg Senior Center is the largest non-profit community center for older adults in Baltimore City. The purpose of this project is to enable the Myerberg to improve facilities, including a new roof; an overhaul of heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning systems throughout the building; concrete and landscaping repairs; window repair and replacement; and other upgrades. **\$500,000 was allocated in the capital budget for this project.**

OPERATING BUDGET

CHANA Elder Abuse Program

\$75,000 FY25 (Level Funded)

According to the Federal Register, 1 in 10 people over the age of 60 in America have experienced some form of elder abuse, but cases are still widely underreported. Older adult abuse victims require complex care and service delivery system coordination, transportation, and sheltering that extends beyond the capacities of traditional domestic violence and sexual abuse service providers. This program within CHANA supports the much-needed response to elder abuse. CHANA has established itself as an effective, collaborative, and coordinated response for victims and their families.

Community Network: Empowering Older Adults to Thrive in Supportive Communities

\$225,000 FY25 (Level Funded)

The Senior Friendly Neighborhoods (SFN) program began over a decade ago as a demonstration project with significant, but temporary, financial support from the U.S. Department of Aging. The Associated, the Maryland Department of Aging, and local foundations now fund the program, which has undergone structural changes in recent years to fulfill the needs of a growing aging community. Northwest Neighbors Connecting (NNC) is a member-driven village started with the support of CHAI. As CHAI builds leadership and expertise in village development and support, CHAI personnel are often approached by groups who want to know more about NNC. The agency engages in open sharing of activities and ideas with other organizations who may be interested in the formation of their own village. We look forward to Maryland becoming a Village Friendly state.

Aging-in-Place for Holocaust Survivors

\$350,000 FY25 (Level Funded)

The primary goal of the Baltimore Holocaust Survivors Program is to enable Baltimore-based Holocaust Survivors to age in place with a sense of safety, comfort, and community – elements of which they were deprived earlier in their lives. A recent estimate indicates that approximately 500 Holocaust survivors live in the greater Baltimore metropolitan area. Of those, Jewish Community Services (JCS) currently provides services and supports to more than 350 Holocaust survivors and their families. During FY 2023, JCS provided a total of \$5,777,976 in subsidies to help offset the cost of 298,481 hours of service compared to \$4,700,000 in subsidies to help offset the cost of 236,300 hours in FY22. These numbers include the \$350,000 of State funding.

Maryland Israel Development Center (MIDC)

\$300,000 FY25 (Level Funded)

The Maryland/Israel Development Center is a nonprofit organization that promotes bilateral trade and economic development between Maryland and Israel. Established in 1992, the MIDC is a “public private partnership” of the Maryland Department of Commerce, Israel’s Ministry of Economy and Trade, and The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore. Currently, approximately 42 Israeli companies maintain offices or representatives in Maryland, including the MIDC’s largest success, Elta North America, a billion-dollar Israeli defense company which the MIDC attracted to Howard County in 2012. During a state trade mission to Israel in 2016, Elta announced they were expanding in Maryland with the goal of growing to 100 employees.

OTHER FY25 BUDGET PRIORITIES

\$9 million was secured for the BOOST scholarship program for low-income families with no language regarding the phasing out of the program.

\$6 million for the Textbooks and Technology Program.

\$5 million appropriated for the Protecting Religious Institutions Grant Program.

\$3 million allocated for the Schools and Childcare Centers at Risk of Hate Crimes Grant Program.

\$2.5 million for nonpublic school safety improvements and healthcare needs.

\$500,000 for a pilot program (split equally between Montgomery and Baltimore counties) to assist with transportation for nonpublic school students to reduce traffic congestion.

POLICY PRIORITIES

HB71- Education – Holocaust Education Assistance Grant Program – Established

Del. Mark Edelson

This bill would establish the \$500,000 Holocaust Education Assistance Grant Program as an annual appropriation in the budget under the Maryland State Department of Education. These grants would be available to all 24 jurisdictions to assist with Holocaust education in public schools. It authorizes a local school system to apply to the Department for a grant of no more than \$50,000 to be used only for certain Holocaust-related training, materials, and activities.

Final Status: Due to a high fiscal note, this bill did not receive a vote in the Ways & Means Committee.

SB528/HB537- Income Tax- Credit for Nonpublic School Student Bus Transportation Expenses

Sen. Shelly Hettleman/Del. Dalya Attar

During the 2023 Legislative Session, a Task Force was established to study ways to support families of students in nonpublic schools regarding transportation. As recommended by the Task Force, this legislation would establish a refundable credit against the State income tax for nonpublic school student bus transportation expenses paid by an individual resident who is the parent or guardian of the student during the taxable year, with a cap at \$1,500.

Final Status: Due to a high fiscal note, this bill did not receive a vote in either committee. However, \$500,000 was allocated in the transportation department budget for a pilot program to expand transportation opportunities for nonpublic students in Baltimore County and Montgomery County.

HB763- Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention- Membership

Del. Dalya Attar

This legislation comes as a direct result of Attorney General Anthony Brown's temporary suspension of CAIR Maryland's appointee on the Attorney General's Hate Crimes Commission for the appointee's hateful, antisemitic rhetoric following the October 7th Massacre on their verified, public social media page. AG Brown reinstated this member a week later out of concern that he did not have proper authority to suspend or remove a commissioner. As originally drafted, the bill would have removed CAIR Maryland from the Attorney General's Hate Crimes Commission and replaced them with two representatives selected from the Muslim community. This follows in the footsteps of President Biden's decision to remove CAIR National as an entity able to educate on hate under the National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism, and U.S. National Strategy to Counter Islamophobia, without removing Muslim representation on the Commission. As amended, this bill recreates the Hate Crimes Commission membership. It keeps 10 designated representatives from government entities that deal with hate

crimes and leaves it to the Attorney General to appoint 15 individuals who represent or advocate on behalf of individuals who are protected under the state hate crimes statute. Those 15 appointees are subject to confirmation by the Maryland Senate.

Final Status: With just minutes left before adjournment, this bill made it to the Governor's desk for signature.

HB809- Members of Boards, Committees, Commissions, Task Forces, or Workgroups – Removal or Suspension

Del. Joe Vogel

In partnership with the Attorney General's Office, this legislation would give authority to the individual or entity that has appointed someone to serve on a statutorily created board, committee, commission, task force, or workgroup to suspend or remove the member for misconduct, incompetence, neglect of duties, or any other cause deemed reasonable. This legislative effort also comes as a direct result of Attorney General Anthony Brown's temporary suspension of CAIR Maryland's appointee on the Attorney General's Hate Crimes Commission.

Final Status: This bill is on the Governor's desk for signature.

SB1033/HB926- Maryland Building Performance Standards – Local Requests for Guidance – Religious Considerations

Sen. Jill Carter/Del. Mike Griffith

This bill allows local jurisdictions, in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General, to provide guidance for the implementation and enforcement of the Maryland Building Performance Standards in relation to any religious observance, practice, or belief. This will help alleviate the burden of the International Energy Conservation Code, which requires that all new commercial buildings have motion-sensor lights installed, and the conflicts it poses with observing Shabbat and other holidays. Without this official guidance, the state is at risk of losing federal funding for performance standards.

Final Status: This bill is on the Governor's desk for signature.

HB1041 – Criminal Law- Hate Crimes- Religion and Disability

Del. Jon Cardin

Most states across the country use the term "religion" rather than "religious beliefs" (as Maryland currently does) in their respective hate crimes statutes. This bill would update Maryland's hate crimes statute to include "religion" as well as "disability."

Final Status: This bill passed the House but stalled in the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee.

SB1058/HB1181- Education – Curriculum Standards – Antihate and Holocaust Education (Educate to Stop the Hate Act)

Sen. Ben Kramer/Del. C.T. Wilson

This bill takes a bold step to help educate our young people, by requiring local boards of education to update history curricula to include the topics of genocide, torture, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the treatment of ethnic and religious minorities; the history and contributions of historically disadvantaged groups; and the history of genocide, including the Holocaust.

Final Status: This bill passed the Senate but stalled in the House. Fortunately, MSDE has announced that they are convening a new Educate to Stop the Hate Committee to further investigate and address these curriculum gaps.

HB1386- Education- Employee Training and Holocaust Education Study – Requirements

Del. Vanessa Atterbeary

This bill requires teachers and administrators to learn about antisemitism and Islamophobia prevention so they can better address and ultimately deter these types of incidents in schools. By equipping school personnel with the tools to teach children why hateful rhetoric is so harmful, we can prevent students from being exposed to incidents like swastikas in bathrooms or other hateful graffiti. Further, by requiring MSDE to assess Holocaust education in schools, we can better learn where there may be gaps in the system and correct them.

Final Status: This bill is on the Governor's desk for signature.

OTHER BILLS WE SUPPORTED

SB124/HB400- Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance- Annual Behavioral Health Wellness Visits- Coverage and Reimbursement

Sen. Malcolm Augustine/Del. Jamila Woods

This bill would require the Maryland Medical Assistance Program and health insurers to provide coverage for annual behavioral health wellness visits, regardless of whether a diagnosis is made at the end of the visit. Just as we are afforded an annual physical, we should also have access to an annual behavioral health assessment.

Final Status: Due to a high fiscal note, this bill did not receive a vote in either committee.

SB753/HB869 – Public Safety- Firearm Background Checks, Victim Notification, and the Maryland State Police Gun Center

Sen. Shelly Hettleman/Del. Sandy Bartlett

This bill would require anyone in Maryland (likely State Police and/or regulated firearm dealers who conduct background checks) to notify the State Police Gun Center of a background check denial. The State Police Gun Center will then notify the local law enforcement agency within 24 hours, and that agency would then be responsible for notifying any victim of domestic violence of the background check denial if it is based on a prohibited person pursuant to an order of protection or violation of a protective order. In this way, victims can be informed of their abuser's potential intentions and take necessary precautions.

Final Status: Due to a high fiscal note, this bill did not receive a vote in either committee.

HB892 – Criminal Law- Benefits Exploitation

Del. Aaron Kaufman

This bill would create a criminal offense of benefits exploitation -- making it a felony to knowingly recruit, harbor, transport, or obtain an individual for the purpose of appropriating the government benefits of an individual for the benefit of the person or another. Many older adults and individuals with disabilities are unfortunately susceptible to this type of abuse. CHANA recently supported an older gentleman who was physically assaulted, deprived of food, and falsely imprisoned in his basement. His abusive relatives only let him out for trips to the bank on the day after his pension and Social Security benefits were deposited. They then forced him to give the funds to them. To date, Maryland law does not specifically address the exploitation of older adults, such as this client, to gain access to their benefits.

Final Status: This bill passed the House but stalled in the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee.

BILLS AND RESOLUTIONS WE OPPOSED

HJ2- Supporting a Long-Term Ceasefire in Israel and Palestine

Del. Gabriel Acevero

This ill-informed resolution would require the General Assembly of Maryland convey to Maryland's Congressional Delegation its support for an immediate, long-term ceasefire in Israel and Gaza, the return of all hostages, and delivery of adequate humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people. As drafted, the resolution would have absolved Hamas, recognized by our government as a terrorist organization, of responsibility for the October 7th massacre inciting war, and attempts to strip Israel of the basic right to self-defense. This resolution promoted antisemitic vitriol; divides the community; and would have exacerbated the rhetoric that has already led to the astronomical rise of antisemitism and Islamophobia.

Final Status: This resolution did not receive a vote in the House Rules Committee.

HJ5 – Commitment to Free Speech, Academic Freedom, and Open Public Discourse

Del. Ashanti Martinez

This resolution, at face-value, seemed non-controversial. It was meant to reaffirm the Maryland General Assembly's commitment to free speech, academic freedom, and open public discourse; and uphold the right of individuals to express views on matters of foreign policy. However, it specifically calls out the government of the State of Israel, while not referencing any other foreign government. "That the General Assembly of Maryland opposes any efforts to infringe on the constitutionally protected right to criticize foreign governments, including the State of Israel..."

Final Status: This resolution did not receive a vote in the House Rules Committee.

HJ8 - Condemning Islamophobia, Anti-Palestinian Hate, and Antisemitism

Del. Ashanti Martinez

This resolution attempts to condemn Islamophobia, Anti-Palestinian Hate, and Antisemitism, but says nothing about the hatred toward Israelis. With statements like "Maryland was founded on the principles of equality, justice, and respect for the rights and dignity of **all** individuals," specifically leaving out Anti-Israeli Hate was intentional, which was echoed in the hearing when the sponsor was asked if leaving this category out was an oversight.

Final Status: This resolution did not receive a vote in the House Rules Committee.

HB1124- Civil Actions- Nonprofit Organizations- Unauthorized Support of Israeli Settlement Activity (Not on Our Dime Act)

Del. Gabriel Acevero

This bill would revoke the tax-exempt status of nonprofits that support Israel. Though the bill's title would suggest that its focus is on "settler violence" in Israel, its overly broad language could arguably impose severe penalties on many Jewish and pro-Israel nonprofit organizations (including their directors, officers, and employees) doing critical humanitarian work far removed from the conduct described in the bill. This legislation unjustly targets one specific country (and Jewish nonprofits) when there are already laws in place to prevent not-for-profit organizations from engaging in illegal activity.

Final Status: This bill did not receive a vote in the Judiciary Committee.

HB1254 - Child Care Providers – Criminal History Records Checks and Abuse and Neglect Clearances – Requirements

Del. Melissa Wells

While well intentioned, as amended in the House, this bill would allow the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the Department of Human Services (DHS) to ignore federal requirements around background check turnaround times for childcare centers. This bill's intent was to ensure that DHS and MSDE followed federal regulations of a maximum of 45 days to send background check results to childcare centers of potential staff. As amended in the House, they were only required to meet the 45-day requirement if staffing and resources allowed, ultimately removing the deadline and going against federal requirements of a 45-day period.

[Final Status: Passed the House with problematic amendments and failed to receive a vote in the Senate Committee.](#)