



Ensuring Access to Religious Facilities

Given the rise of antisemitism and other forms of religious hate, we need to ensure that religious facilities remain accessible to their members and lawful visitors. As protests outside of religious facilities increase across the country, calling for elected officials and activists alike to condemn this behavior, it is important that we establish guardrails to protect folks entering and exiting religious facilities.

SB177/HBXXX: Criminal Law - Interference With Access to or Egress From a Religious Facility – Prohibition (Sen. Chris West/Del. Sandy Rosenberg)

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee/House Judiciary Committee

Modeled after legislation preventing the blocking of access to medical facilities, this legislation would establish a misdemeanor penalty for those who block access to the entrance of religious facilities. Religious facilities include a place of worship, a cemetery, a religious school, an educational facility, a community center, and the grounds adjacent to them. According to testimony from the Maryland State’s Attorneys’ Association, “this bill establishes protections for religious communities in a way that respects other important, and constitutionally protected, activity, striking an appropriate balance in a way that will survive constitutional scrutiny.”

Why is this important to the Jewish Community?

Acts of intimidation outside of our places of worship continue to escalate across the country. Earlier this winter, we saw protesters chanting pro-Hamas slogans seeking to block access to a synagogue in Queens, N.Y., as well as a similar protest to disrupt and block access to a gathering at a synagogue located in Koreatown in Los Angeles. We have seen students at Hillels on college campuses and community members at their local synagogues feel intimidated and fearful of entering these facilities because protestors have blocked the entrances. This behavior is unacceptable, and access should be safeguarded by our state before more incidents occur.