



JEWISH COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL OF HOWARD COUNTY PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES 2019

ANTI-SEMITISM

The JCRC is greatly concerned about rising anti-Semitism around the world and growing anti-Semitism in our own nation. In the US, our government leaders at all levels, clergy of all faiths, and civil society in general, must acknowledge, confront, and combat anti-Semitism within our own borders. In the state of Maryland, anti-Jewish incidents reported to Maryland police agencies rose from 53 to 78 between 2016 and 2017. Most of these incidents (46), were vandalism and 26 were written or verbal intimidation incidents. Overall, reported hate and bias incidents in Maryland rose from 295 in 2016 to 398 in 2017. (*Baltimore Sun*, 10/30/18)

The Holocaust was not an accident in history; it occurred because individuals, organizations, and governments made choices that not only legalized discrimination but also encouraged prejudice, hatred, and ultimately mass murder. Developing an understanding of the roots and ramifications of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping in any society helps people to understand the dangers of remaining silent, apathetic, and indifferent to the oppression of others and helps to limit the resurgence of anti-Semitism.

The JCRC will address any forms of anti-Semitism that arise locally, and will work with elected and appointed government officials, HCPSS officials, clergy, and others to combat this form of hatred and intolerance; it will also endeavor to educate the community about the dangers of anti-Semitism and all forms of racism, bias, and xenophobia.

CIVIL RIGHTS

Like other national Jewish organizations, the JCRC is committed to protecting and advancing civil rights for all residents of Howard County, as well as all Americans. We strive to protect individuals discriminated against on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity and support policies that address and combat bullying, harassment, and hate crimes. The JCRC endorses and supports the efforts of national Jewish organizations that work with the executive branch to ensure that civil rights statutes — such as the Hate Crimes Prevention Act, Genetic Information Non-Discrimination Act, and updates to the Americans with Disabilities Act — are implemented and enforced.

EDUCATION

Education is one of the most important determinants of lifetime earnings, social mobility, and health outcomes, and is a fundamental tenant of the Jewish faith. Yet many of our nation's public schools are chronically underfunded and underperforming, especially within low-income and rural communities. The problems that afflict our education system begin early, starting with the inaccessibility of affordable, high-quality preschools. Increasing the availability and affordability of early childhood education is one of the surest ways to close the achievement gap. The JCRC will monitor and work with the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) to ensure it provides quality education to all its students.

In Howard County, the JCRC has combatted recent anti-Semitic acts and harassment in the HCPSS, and has urged quick and resolute actions by school staff and the administration. The JCRC monitors the process of reporting hate and bias incidents in HCPSS and action taken following incidents in middle and high schools. The JCRC is encouraged that HCPSS recently adopted the Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) "No Place for Hate" program in its middle schools, in response to our request to institute such programs within the school system.

At the request of JCRC and the Howard County Board of Rabbis, HCPSS is studying how best to incorporate other ADL anti-hatred curriculum for K-12 into the social studies curriculum. Further, programs and curricula from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) are designed specifically to teach that silence and indifference to the suffering of others, or to the infringement of civil rights in our society can perpetuate hate

and bias toward “the other.” The JCRC can make a unique contribution to prevent the growth of hate and bias in Howard County by promoting these ADL and USHMM programs, as well as the teaching of the Holocaust and its lessons.

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

The JCRC supports the position of several national Jewish organizations that climate change is an international security threat, human-induced, and one of the greatest moral issues of our time. The JCRC endorses and supports continued advocacy for legislation in Howard County and at the State level to require clean, renewable energy and discourage continued dependence on fossil fuels that emit carbon dioxide and warm the Earth’s atmosphere.

Access to clean water and clean air is a human right. The JCRC supports policies that protect the environment in all communities, including low-income communities, and require fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

In so doing, Howard County, the State of Maryland, and the US can lessen the gravity of the coming impacts of global warming and reflect our Jewish values of protecting Creation and “repairing the world.”

HEALTH

To protect our lives and well-being, every family in Howard County and in Maryland should have access to adequate health care. Part of that health care is the cost of prescription drugs. Overall drug prices increased almost 9% in 2016, while general inflation increased just over 2% in the same period. Since 2013, drug prices have risen an average of 10% annually, well over the rate of inflation at 1.2% on average since 2013.

The JCRC supports the Prescription Drug Affordability Initiative of the Maryland Citizens Health Initiative. This program calls for establishing a Prescription Drug Affordability Board in Maryland to determine how best to make prescription drugs more affordable for Marylanders. The board would examine the entire drug supply chain, including the role of

drug manufacturers and Pharmacy Benefit Managers. The Board would also establish payment rates for expensive drugs that create significant affordability problems for Marylanders, building on the state's successful tradition of health care cost scrutiny.

HOMELESSNESS & AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Over 40% of Howard County renters pay more than 30% of their incomes in rent, while 22% of renters pay more than 50% of their income in rent (defined by HUD as severely rent-burdened). At the same time, there are 5,000 people waiting for Housing Choice Vouchers. Astonishingly, an estimated 500 children in the HCPSS are homeless.

Many public and non-profit organizations in Howard County are working together to lessen the suffering of our population on the brink of homelessness by increasing the amount of affordable housing and by working for policies to provide more access to homes for low-income populations. The JCRC applauds and supports their work.

By consulting with the Association of Community Services in Howard County, Howard County Department of Services and Resources, and others, the JCRC will join efforts in the County that will enable us to support policies and educate our members about local resources for affordable housing assistance and about issues that can make a difference in public policy at the local and national level.

IMMIGRATION

Informed by Jewish values and traditions, the JCRC supports federal immigration policy that balances the protection of civil and human rights with national security concerns. The JCRC supports reforming our nation's immigration system to create a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. We support effective border security that is consistent with humanitarian values and protects civil, human, workers' rights, and the right to seek asylum. Our immigration system should reflect the best of our national values: equality, fairness, due process under the law, and respect for human dignity.

We applaud and support the work of HIAS (see: hias.org/tagged/border-response), originally founded as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society in 1881 to assist Jews fleeing pogroms in Russia and Eastern Europe. Today, HIAS provides, legal, physical and relocation assistance to refugees no matter where they are.

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE

Along with the leading major national Jewish organizations, the JCRC supports and advocates for two independent, democratic, and economically viable states: a Jewish State of Israel and a Palestinian state, coexisting in peace and security. This vision can only be achieved through direct negotiations. Unilateral attempts to achieve Palestinian statehood through United Nations action — as well Palestinian efforts to achieve full membership in United Nations-affiliated bodies — are counterproductive.

OLDER ADULTS & AGING

By 2035, Howard County residents age 65 and older will comprise over 21% of the population. That is a demographic transformation that will affect everyone.

To accommodate these changes, the JCRC supports efforts in Howard County to enact policies that enable older adults to age-in-place and where people of all ages can grow, prosper, and live with dignity.

To that end, the JCRC supports protecting older adults from abuse, neglect, and exploitation; recognizes the importance of the mental, physical, and financial well-being of older adults and their caregivers; appreciates that there will be more “sandwich generation” caregivers and more grandparents raising children; understands the challenges faced by those living on a fixed income; supports the inclusion of Universal Design elements in housing options to enable residents to age in the community and function independently for as long as possible; understands that safe, reliable, affordable, and convenient transportation is a critical component of aging in a community; promotes an intergenerational, healthy quality of life that integrates physical, educational, behavioral, and spiritual well-being.

POVERTY & FOOD INSECURITY

The JCRC is committed to building a more just and equitable society, both in Howard County and nationally, especially as a growing number of middle and low-income families face temporary and permanent poverty due to stagnating wages and increasing job insecurity. JCRC supports an increase in the minimum wage and policies that expand eligibility for the Earned Income and Child Tax Credits.

The JCRC further supports a robust social safety net that includes important programs such as Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and related Maryland statewide programs. To lift the next generation out of poverty, the JCRC also supports full funding for child nutrition programs, such as the Summer Feeding Program and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Food insecurity is one of the most acute hardships many Americans, including children, face across the country – and too many Howard County residents are not immune to this hardship.

SECURITY & SAFETY

Security and safety from violence are requirements for a free and just society. After the October 2018 murder of 11 Jews at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, the Jewish Federation of Howard County and the JCRC intensified work with the Howard County Police Department (HCPD) to safeguard religious institutions and community gathering spaces.

The JCRC partners with the HCPD and security experts to make information available about local services offered by HCPD, the Department of Homeland Security, and the State of Maryland to local synagogues, interfaith centers, and community meeting spaces. By retrofitting infrastructure, instituting security precautions, and undergoing proper training, Jewish institutions can limit vulnerability to attacks. In addition, experts can advise about how to institute individual and collective practices to limit unwanted access to local facilities and to increase awareness of our surroundings.

VOTING RIGHTS

The lifeblood of our democracy is the ability for every eligible citizen to cast a ballot for a candidate of his or her own choosing. The JCRC supports policies to ensure fair and representative elections, including strong support for the Voting Rights Act and early voting. The JCRC is concerned about national trends to reduce opportunities for early voting, cumbersome registration requirements, restricted absentee voting, and the scheduling of elections and caucuses on religiously-sensitive days, including the Jewish Sabbath.

The JCRC encourages efforts by several national Jewish organizations to urge Congress to pass the bipartisan Voting Rights Amendment Act, a common-sense fix that ensures that every American has the opportunity to cast a meaningful ballot. The JCRC also applauds the Maryland State Board of Elections' efforts in Howard County to provide ample and convenient voting locations and early voting. We also support policies that make the process of voting easier and more accessible.

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