



Federal Hate Crimes Bill Re-Introduced in Congress

By GayWebMonkey.com

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Washington, D.C. - Reps. John Conyers, D-Mich., and Mark Kirk, R-Ill., re-introduced the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act (LLEHCPA), a critical piece of legislation providing local police and sheriff's departments with federal resources to combat hate violence, in the U.S House of Representatives on Tuesday night.

Gay groups such as the Human Rights Campaign and the Matthew Shepard Foundation hailed the bill's introduction and joined with more than 210 law enforcement, civil rights, civic and religious organizations actively supporting its passage.

More than 100 other members of Congress joined Conyers and Kirk in introducing the bipartisan bill. The Senate is expected to introduce a bipartisan companion bill next month.



"Each year, thousands of Americans are violently attacked just because they are black, female, Christian or gay. These crimes not only harm individuals, but they terrorize entire communities. It's the responsibility of our government to protect all Americans. After more than a decade of delay, it's time for Congress to provide local police and sheriffs' departments with the tools and resources they need to put away society's most vicious criminals," Human Rights Campaign President Joe Solmonese said in a release.

Caroline Fredrickson, director of the ACLU Washington Legislative Office, was similarly bolstered by the introduction of the bill. "The ACLU believes we need a stronger federal response to criminal civil rights violations with clear protections for free speech and free association," she said in a release. "As introduced, the bill includes an important provision protecting 1st Amendment rights, seeking to punish acts of discrimination, not bigoted beliefs."

"The reintroduction of the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act in the House of Representatives last night marks a very important moment for the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community," added Judy Shepard, executive director of the Matthew Shepard Foundation and mother of Matthew Shepard, in a separate release. "For far too long violence motivated by hatred against GLBT individuals has gone unrecognized by the Federal Government as well as many local agencies.

"The LLEHCPA will provide local law enforcement with the added resources and support needed for investigating and prosecuting serious hate crimes that are not currently included in existing law," she continued. "The investigation of Matthew's murder and the trial of his killers cost Albany County in Wyoming more than \$150,000. This unplanned financial burden forced the Sheriff's Department to furlough five of its employees. If the LLEHCPA had been the law of the land in 1998, this reduction in vital staff could have been averted, while still ensuring that justice was served for my son."

Because there is no federal law mandating states and municipalities to report hate crimes, they are often underreported. However, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's own statistics, based on voluntary reporting, show that since 1991, more than 100,000 hate crime offenses have been reported to the FBI, with 7,163 reported in 2005, the FBI's most recent reporting period. Violent crimes based on sexual orientation constituted 14.2 percent of all hate crimes in 2005, with 1,017 reported for the year.

The LLEHCPA gives the Justice Department the power to investigate and prosecute bias-motivated violence where the perpetrator has selected the victim because of the person's actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability. It provides the Justice Department with the ability to aid state and local jurisdictions either by lending assistance or, where local authorities are unwilling or unable, by taking the lead in investigations and prosecutions of violent crimes resulting in death or serious bodily injury that were motivated by bias. It also makes grants available to state and local communities to combat violent crimes committed by juveniles, train law enforcement officers or assist

in state and local investigations and prosecution of bias-motivated crimes.

A wide coalition of national organizations has called for the passage of the LLEHCPA legislation. Some of those supporting this legislation include: the National Sheriffs Association, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, 31 state attorneys general and the National District Attorneys Association.

Both the Senate and House have voted in favor of legislation to combat bias-motivated violence in the prior Congresses. Most recently in the 109th Congress, the House of Representative approved its hate crimes bill as an amendment on a bipartisan vote of 223 to 199. House and Senate votes were held in the 106th and 108th Congresses as well. In the 108th Congress, the Senate passed the measure by an overwhelming vote of 65-33, with 18 Senate Republicans voting yes, and the House approved it on a bipartisan vote of 213-186, with 31 Republicans voting yes.