



June 25, 2009

The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Chairman
Senate Judiciary Committee
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Leahy:

I write today as a concerned clergy member and as a member of African American Ministers in Action (AAMIA), a program of People For the American Way. I applaud your efforts to pass the Matthew Shepard Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009 (S. 909), and thank you for holding this hearing today. I hope that this bill moves swiftly through the committee process and through the Senate. As you know, the House has passed similar legislation, and it is my hope that the Senate will follow suit. It would be a great achievement if the President is able to sign this bill into law this session. I have attached materials for the record of your hearing that should also be of use as this debate moves forward.

All of our brothers and sisters should have equal protection from violence and discrimination under the law. Yet, I am particularly concerned with the outrageous claims of those who choose to portray the hate crimes legislation as a “threat to religious liberty.” They spread the lie that the churches will be silenced, and that church leaders and their supporters will be jailed for speaking out against homosexuality. The bottom line: This is all completely false. I draw your attention to the materials I’ve submitted, especially the myths and facts from AAMIA.

The hallmark of my Christian faith is not in how many people we can set ourselves against, nor in how many people we can exclude based upon our particular notions of theology or church dogma. What distinguishes us as people of God is our ability and willingness to love one another – no matter what. When the world sees how we treat the gay and lesbian members of our congregations and communities, will they know us by our love? Will they see Christ reflected in our actions?

AAMIA fully respects the principle of separation of church and state, which helps preserve the constitutional values of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Thank you again for your tireless efforts in support of the Matthew Shepard Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009 (S. 909). Please consider me a resource in the future.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Kenneth Lee Samuel
Pastor and founder of Victory for the World Church
Stone Mountain, GA

Rev. Dr. Kenneth Lee Samuel is pastor and founder of Victory for the World Church in Stone Mountain, Ga. Rev. Samuel is vice-chair of PFAW Foundation's African American Ministers Leadership Council, a Senior Fellow at People For the American Way, Dr. Samuel is an outspoken advocate for Human Rights issues, and is the immediate past president of the DeKalb County Branch of the NAACP. In addition, in his individual capacity, Dr. Samuel has been elected as a Georgia delegate to the last four Democratic National Conventions. Dr. Samuel's comments on equal justice for all people, especially LGBT brothers and sisters, have appeared in national and local publications including a recent *New York Times* story on reactions to the Jeremiah Wright controversy, as well as *The Washington Post*, and *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Dr. Samuel's book entitled, *Solomon's Success: Four Essential Keys to Leadership*, has recently appeared as the #1 best seller under Pilgrim Press in the Christian Century.