

**African American Ministers in Action • Alliance of Baptists • American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee • American Conference of Cantors • American Islamic Congress • American Jewish Committee • Anti-Defamation League • B'nai Brith International • Central Conference of American Rabbis • Disciples Justice Action Network • The Episcopal Church • Equal Partners in Faith • FaithTrust Institute • Friends Committee on National Legislation • Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America • Interfaith Alliance • Islamic Society of North America • Jewish Council for Public Affairs • Jewish Labor Committee • Jewish Reconstructionist Federation • Jewish Women International • Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns • Methodist Federation for Social Action • Metropolitan Community Churches • Muslim Advocates • Muslim Public Affairs Council • NA'AMAT • National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd • National Council of Jewish Women • NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby • North American Federation of Temple Youth • Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office • Rabbinical Assembly • Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing • Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund • Sikh Coalition • Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE) • Union for Reform Judaism • Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations • United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries • United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society • United Methodist Church, General Commission on Religion and Race • UNITED SIKHS • United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism • Women of Reform Judaism**

April 8, 2009

Dear Representative,

**As representatives of a diverse array of religious communities, we write to urge you to co-sponsor and vote in support of the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act—H.R. 1913 (LLEHCPA).** In the 110th Congress, the House approved similar legislation on May 3, 2007 with a bipartisan majority of 237-180.

Hate is neither a religious nor American value. The sacred scriptures of many different faith traditions speak with dramatic unanimity on the subject of hate. Crimes motivated by hatred or bigotry are an assault not only upon individual victims' freedoms, but also upon a belief that lies at the core of our diverse faith traditions -- that every human being is created in the image of God. While we recognize that legislation alone cannot remove hatred from the hearts and minds of individuals, the LLEHCPA will serve as a crucial step in building a society where hate-motivated crimes are deemed intolerable.

In 2007, the FBI documented 7,624 hate crimes directed against institutions and individuals because of their race, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, or disability. But these troubling statistics do not speak for themselves – because behind each and every one of these incidents are individuals, families, and communities deeply impacted by these crimes. The LLEHCPA will stream-line the process for the Department of Justice to assist local authorities to investigate and prosecute these cases –

and permit federal involvement in cases that occur because of a victim's gender, disability, gender identity or sexual orientation.

Existing federal law is inadequate to address the significant national problem of hate crimes. Not only does current law contain obstacles to effective enforcement, but it also does not provide authority to investigate and prosecute bias crimes based on disability, gender, gender identity or sexual orientation. We are morally obligated to call for laws to protect all Americans from hate-motivated violence.

The LLEHCPA does not in any way violate First Amendment protections. Hate crime laws do not restrict speech. Rather, they target only criminal conduct prompted by prejudice. Some critics of the LLEHCPA have erroneously asserted that enactment of the measure would prohibit the lawful expression of one's deeply held religious beliefs. These fears are unfounded. **The LLEHCPA does not punish, nor prohibit in any way, preaching or other expressions of religious belief, name-calling, or even expressions of hatred toward any group. It covers only violent actions that result in death or bodily injury.**

Although we believe that state and local governments should continue to have the primary responsibility for investigating and prosecuting hate crimes, an expanded federal role is necessary to ensure adequate and equitable response to these divisive crimes. The federal government must have authority to address those important cases in which local authorities are either unable or unwilling to investigate and prosecute.

Now is the time for Congress to publicly reaffirm its commitment to protect all Americans from such flagrant bias-motivated violence. As people of faith and leaders in the religious community, we are committed to eradicating the egregious hatred and violence which divides our society. We believe that the LLEHCPA is vital to this struggle, and we ask you to support its passage.

Respectfully,

African American Ministers in Action  
Alliance of Baptists  
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee  
American Conference of Cantors  
American Islamic Congress  
American Jewish Committee  
Anti-Defamation League  
B'nai Brith International  
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Disciples Justice Action Network  
The Episcopal Church  
Equal Partners in Faith  
FaithTrust Institute  
Friends Committee on National Legislation

Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America  
Interfaith Alliance  
Islamic Society of North America  
Jewish Council for Public Affairs  
Jewish Labor Committee  
Jewish Reconstructionist Federation  
Jewish Women International  
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns  
Methodist Federation for Social Action  
Metropolitan Community Churches  
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