

Federal Hate Crimes Bill Introduced

by Bob Roehr

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The Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives on March 20 by Judiciary Committee Chairman John Conyers, D-Mich., and Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Ill. Eight Republicans are among the more than 100 co-sponsors. A companion bill is expected to be introduced in the Senate in April.

The bill has broad support from national law enforcement, civic and civil rights organizations. Essentially, it adds sexual orientation to the list of categories already covered as hate crimes.

It gives the Department of Justice limited authority to intervene when state and local officials do not seem to be adequately investigating hate crimes against gays. It also allows the Department to support those authorities and provide training and funding in the area.

“At long last, Congress is poised to recognize the reality of hate violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. It’s a disgrace that bigotry and ignorance have prevented Congress from taking real action to address hate crimes for nearly twenty years,” said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

At a community forum in February, Foreman expressed frustration that the LGBT community even had to devote time and energy to “playing catch up” on an issue that should have been resolved more than a decade ago.

“This is not a Republican issue or a Democratic issue; it’s a human rights issue. Hate is not an American value,” asserted Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean.