

LGBT-inclusive hate crimes bill passed by House

May 10, 2007

Civil rights organizations hailed the passage of a new bipartisan hate crime bill in the House last week.

The bill, the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2007, would amend current legislation that lists race, religion, color and national origin as categories federally protected from hate crimes, to include sexual orientation, gender identity, gender and disability.

Wade Henderson, president of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, welcomed passage of the bill. He declared it "a win for young GLBT men and women, including an increasing number of GLBT individuals of color, who have lost their lives for merely being who they are."

Urging quick passage of the bill, currently in the Senate, National Organization for Women President Kim Gandy said, "Hate violence sends two messages to the targeted group: 'not knowing your place is dangerous' and 'your kind is not welcome here.'"

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force singled out the bill's inclusion of gender identity as a protected category for special mention.

"This clear inclusion of transgender people in hate crimes laws is especially important," read an NGLTF statement. "[V]iolence against transgender people is widespread, largely underreported and disproportionately greater than the number of transgender people in society."

According to the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the anti-hate-crimes bill has broad support from law enforcement organizations, religious groups, labor unions and civil rights organizations, including the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the Presbyterian and Episcopal Churches, and the Parent Network on Disabilities. Approximately three in four Americans support comprehensive hate crimes legislation.

Yet the bill's passage may be thwarted by the loud voices of a few extremists.

Right-wing radio personality James Dobson is leading an effort to pressure Republican senators and President Bush to block passage of the bill. Bush has indicated that he may veto the bill if sent to his desk. In a recent radio program, Dobson implied that laws aimed at preventing hate crimes against gay people are anti-Christian and amount to making anti-gay beliefs a "thought crime."

The Rev. Bishop Yvette Flunder, senior pastor at San Francisco's City of Refuge United Church of Christ, rejected Dobson's message. "When religious leaders speak about a God that supports violence perpetrated upon some supposedly outside of God's will, they give permission for acts that lead to physical abuse and death."

Praising passage of the anti-hate-crimes measure, Flunder, who is African American, said, "People are getting weary of the politics of fear. People are seeking peace. [They] are understanding that violence begets violence."