

**American Jewish Committee / Anti-defamation League / Central Conference of
American Rabbis /
Church Women United / The Episcopal Church, USA / Faith Action Network /
General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church /
Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America / The Interfaith Alliance /
Jewish Council for Public Affairs / Evangelical Lutheran Church in America /
NA'AMAT USA / National Council of Churches of Christ, USA /
National Council of Jewish Women/ Presbyterian Church (USA), Washington Office /
Sikh Council on Religion and Education / United Church of Christ, Justice and
Witness Ministries / Union for Reform Judaism / Unitarian Universalist Association of
Congregations /
Women of Reform Judaism**

22 September 2004

Dear Representative,

As representatives of a diverse array of religious communities, we urge you to vote in support of a motion to instruct House conferees to include the Senate-passed Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act (LLEEA) provisions in the Department of Defense Authorization bill. On June 15, the Senate voted 65-33 to include these provisions and the House version of the LLEEA, HR 4204, has attracted bipartisan support, with over 175 current cosponsors.

In 2002, the FBI documented almost 7,500 hate crimes directed against institutions and individuals because of their race, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, or disability. This legislation would help facilitate the prosecution of hate crimes by expanding the ability of federal prosecutors to prosecute serious forms of hate-based violence by removing unnecessary impediments. It would also extend the protection of current hate crimes law to those who are victimized because of their gender, disability or sexual orientation. As people of faith, we are committed to eradicating the hatred and violence responsible for dividing our communities. We believe that the LLEEA is vital to this struggle, and we ask you to support its passage.

Existing federal law is inadequate to address this 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 or sexual orientation. We are morally obligated to call for laws to protect all Americans from hate-motivated violence, and our laws should reflect that obligation.

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 equal response to these divisive crimes. The federal government must have jurisdiction to address those important cases in which local authorities are either unable or unwilling to investigate and prosecute.

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 LLEEA will serve as a crucial step in building a society where hate-motivated crimes are deemed intolerable. Now is the time for the House to publicly affirm its commitment to protect all of its citizens from such violence. We look forward to working with you on the passage of this legislation.

Respectfully,

American Jewish Committee

Anti-defamation League

Central Conference of American Rabbis

Church Women United

The Episcopal Church, USA

Faith Action Network, People for the American Way

General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church

Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America

The Interfaith Alliance

Jewish Council For Public Affairs

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

NA'AMAT USA

National Council of Churches of Christ, USA

National Council of Jewish Women

Presbyterian Church (USA), Washington Office

Sikh Council on Religion and Education

Union for Reform Judaism

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries

Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

Women of Reform Judaism