

hate crimes

Hate Crimes are crimes committed against individuals as a result of personal characteristics of the victims such as race, color, national origin, gender, and or sexual orientation. These crimes fray the fabric of society because though an act of crime may target an individual person, the result is that they invoke fear among many in a community.

Both the United States Government and states have enacted laws to address hate crimes. Across the country, laws addressing hate crimes vary from state to state. However, among the 45 states that address hate crimes, most address crimes that are related to one or more of the following: a victim's race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender or disability.

On the federal level, President Obama signed "The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act" into law on October 28, 2009. The law updated federal hate crimes statutes by expanding the legal definition of a hate crime to cover crimes committed because of a victim's actual or perceived gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability and lift restrictive requirements regarding engagement in a federally-protected activity. Also, the law provided resources to law enforcement officials including federal training and direct assistance, to combat violent, bias-motivated crime.

Advocates for hate crimes legislation argue that there is strong public support for preventing and ending hate crimes. Advocates point out that a majority of states already have enacted some form of hate crime legislation and that passage of the federal hate crimes law was a bipartisan effort. Advocates also argue that there is widespread support for federal hate crimes legislation among law enforcement, civil rights, civic and religious organizations, including Attorneys General for 22 states, the National Sheriffs' Association, the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

Opponents of hate crimes legislation argue that all crimes should be treated the same regardless of motive. Opponents maintain that special legislation is not needed to address crimes that are motivated by a victim's sexual orientation, gender, gender identity or disability.

YWCA Position

The YWCA supports the passage of Hate Crimes legislation that protects people from harassment, violence and other crimes on the basis of race, sex, gender, religion, ethnicity, age, disability, or sexual orientation.

Candidate Questions

If you are elected what will you do to decrease violence against individuals who are targeted for crimes because of their race, sex, gender, religion, ethnicity, age, disability, or sexual orientation?