



Statements of Support from Religious Leaders For the Senate Hate Crimes Bill

Dr. David P. Gushee, Distinguished University, Professor of Christian Ethics, Mercer University:

As a Christian, I believe in the immeasurable and sacred worth of every human being as made in the image of God and as the object of God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ. In our sinful and violent world, there are tragically very many ways in which this sacredness is violated. This bill deserves Christian support because its aim is to protect the dignity and basic human rights of all Americans, and especially those Americans whose perceived "differentness" makes them vulnerable to physical attacks motivated by bias, hatred and fear. The bill simply strengthens the capacity of our nation's governments to prosecute violent, bias-related crimes. I am persuaded that the bill poses no threat whatsoever to any free speech right for religious communities or their leaders. Its passage will make for a safer and more secure environment in which we and all of our fellow Americans can live our lives. For me, the case for this bill is settled with these words from Jesus: "As you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me" (Mt. 25:40).

Rev. Dr. Derrick Harkins, Pastor, Nineteenth Street Baptist Church, Washington, DC:

A strong Biblical imperative that I believe stands at the heart of my Christian faith is the preservation and protection of the inherent dignity of all persons. The Scriptures are replete with examples of God's concern and compassion for those seen as "other" by many. As an American, I know the protection of personal dignity and human rights is a principle that makes us that much stronger as a nation, and certainly does not stand at odds with freedom of expression. Passage of the Hate Crimes Bill will help to ensure the safeguards of the law for those who are victimized by acts of bias and hate. I welcome the opportunity to support this bill as an expression of my Christian witness, and my belief in our nation's highest aims for all its citizens.

Dr. Joel C. Hunter, Senior Pastor, Northland – A Church Distributed:

I would think that the followers of Jesus would be first in line to protect any group from hate crimes. He was the one who intervened against religious violence aimed at the woman caught in the act of adultery. He protected her while not condoning her behavior. This bill protects both the rights of conservative religious people to voice passionately their interpretations of their scriptures and protects their fellow citizens from physical attack. I strongly endorse this bill.

Rev. Gabriel A. Salguero, Executive and Policy Advisor, The Latino Leadership Circle:

At the heart of the Christian gospel is the belief in the intrinsic dignity of all humanity. When people are targeted for acts of violence the Church must speak out. I support the Hate Crimes bill because it provides room for free speech and religious conviction while protecting groups of people from acts of violence. As a Christian who values both love and truth I support a bill that protects the vulnerable while allowing ministers to speak freely about their faith and moral convictions. The Hate Crimes bill does not call for the sacrifice of either dignity nor conviction. It is my prayer that we continue to find ways forward that honors both freedom of speech and protection for all our citizens.



Stephen Schneck, Director, Life Cycle Institute, The Catholic University of America:

The need for this legislation is patently obvious. Time and again we have seen the horrible spectacle in American history—indeed, in our own time—of gay and lesbian Americans hunted down, murdered, mutilated, attacked, and discriminated against. Existing laws and rights have proven little remedy in diminishing these crimes of hate. Would that every American could someday reverence the dignity of all human beings as they are created by the hand of God. Sadly events continue to document how far this nation must yet go toward that divine measure. Gay and lesbian Americans need the protection this legislation offers.

Jim Wallis, President and CEO, Sojourners:

A fundamental Christian belief is that every person is created in the image of God. Too often in our country when violence has been directed against gay and lesbian people, most Christians have been painfully silent. The hate crimes legislation now in the Senate is designed to strengthen our society's ability to prosecute these crimes. It contains additional explicit protection for free speech and religious liberty, rights which are already guaranteed by our Constitution, and allows for continued free expression of speech about controversial issues around homosexuality, gay marriage, etc. Regardless of the theological differences we may have on these issues, Christians should all agree on the fundamental protection of human rights. That is why I support this legislation.