



**TESTIMONY OF THE ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE  
IN SUPPORT OF RAISED SENATE BILL NO. 604  
"AN ACT CONCERNING HATE CRIMES"**

**JOINT COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY  
MARCH 17, 2008**

Chairman McDonald, Chairman Lawlor, members of the Committee, good morning, my name is David Waren and I am the Connecticut Regional Director of the Anti-Defamation League. I am here today to offer our support for Raised Senate Bill Number 604.

Since 1913, the mission of the Anti-Defamation League has been to "stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment for all citizens alike." We are dedicated to combating anti-Semitism, prejudice and bigotry of all kinds, defending democratic ideals and promoting civil rights. ADL is concerned about recent reports of hate crimes in Connecticut, particularly those where the noose symbol was used as an instrument of intimidation.

These crimes demand priority attention because of their special impact. Bias incidents are designed to intimidate the victim and members of the victim's community, leaving them feeling isolated, vulnerable, and unprotected by the law. Failure to address this unique type of crime could cause an isolated incident to explode into widespread community tension. As an organization which has aggressively led efforts to implement federal and state hate crimes legislation, we recognize the great importance of this measure.

As you may be aware, ADL has closely followed the situation at Jena High School and has expressed deep concern about the racial tensions in the community, the allegations of unfair treatment between black and white students, and the allegations of racial disparity in the

subsequent criminal charges filed against six black students. We are especially concerned by the copycat incidents involving the use of the hangman's noose that continue to be reported around the country, including Philadelphia. In addition to the highly publicized Jena noose episode, similar incidents involving nooses recently have been reported at schools in all over the country including here in Connecticut. With its past associations with lynchings in the South, the noose has long been used to threaten and intimidate others, particularly black Americans. White supremacists have reacted to the national attention focused on Jena 6 with racist language and a call for violent action and intimidation tactics. Sadly, we are still fighting the old demons of hatred and prejudice—even among young people who have no memory of the civil rights era and Jim Crow.

### **THE IMPACT OF CRIMINAL ACTS OF HATE**

All Americans have a stake in effective response to violent and criminal acts of bigotry. These crimes demand priority attention because of their special impact. Bias crimes are designed to intimidate the victim and members of the victim's community, leaving them feeling isolated, vulnerable, and unprotected by the law. Failure to address this unique type of crime can cause an isolated incident to explode into widespread community tension. The damage done by hate crimes, therefore, cannot be measured solely in terms of physical injury or dollars and cents. By making members of minority communities fearful, angry, and suspicious of other groups -- and the power structure that is supposed to protect them -- these incidents can damage the fabric of our society and fragment communities.

### Hate Crime Statutes: A Message to Victims and Perpetrators

In partnership with human rights groups, civic leaders and law enforcement officials can advance police-community relations by demonstrating a commitment to be both tough on hate crime perpetrators and sensitive to the special needs of hate crime victims. While bigotry cannot be outlawed, hate crime penalty enhancement statutes demonstrate an important commitment to confront criminal activity motivated by prejudice.

At present, forty-five states and the District of Columbia have enacted hate crime penalty-enhancement laws, many based on an ADL model statute drafted in 1981. In Wisconsin v. Mitchell, 508 U.S. 476 (1993), the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously upheld the constitutionality of the Wisconsin penalty-enhancement statute -- effectively removing any doubt that state legislatures may properly increase the penalties for criminal activity in which the victim is intentionally targeted because of his/her race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, or ethnicity.

The most recent hate crime statistics, released by the FBI document that hate violence remains far too prevalent in America. The annual FBI report revealed that in 2006, 7,722 hate crimes were reported by more than 12,000 law enforcement agencies across the country. Last year the State of Connecticut reported a total of 131 hate crimes. The FBI's annual report provides some insight into what is occurring in our communities. The measure before you represents another measure that will send a message that intimidation through the use of a noose will not be tolerated.

## Conclusion

Unfortunately, there are no quick, complete solutions to the persistence of racism, bigotry, and anti-Semitism. Ultimately, the impact of all bias crime initiatives will be measured in the response of the criminal justice system to the individual act of hate violence. We urge the Committee to approve this important legislation as soon as possible.