

To the People of Arkansas:

As clergy, ministers, elected officials, community leaders, and citizens we oppose the passage of hate crimes laws.

We acknowledge that there are many problems that affect our society. Many, including ourselves, are working to find solutions to address hatred, racism, inequities in our justice system, violence toward certain groups, and the unrest in our communities. For numerous reasons, hate crimes legislation cannot adequately address or solve these and other problems. Here are three primary concerns:

- 1. Hate crimes laws do not prevent hate crimes.** Hate crimes laws do not protect citizens from hate crimes. Twenty-five years of FBI data proves that states with laws against hate crimes have just as many or more hate crimes than states without these laws. In recent years, several high-profile crimes including mass shootings at a Walmart in El Paso and a synagogue in Pittsburgh occurred in states with hate crimes laws on the books. Hate crimes laws did not prevent the Pulse Nightclub shooting in Florida or the Charlottesville, Virginia attack. Some people say that hate crimes laws would have prevented the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others, but these deaths occurred in states with hate crimes laws on the books.
- 2. Hate crimes laws punish people for their thoughts and beliefs.** Our nation has always respected a person's right to believe anything they choose even if it is repulsive, and to think as they please even if it is wrong, without fear of punishment. Hatred is a matter of the human heart. A free and just society does not punish thoughts or beliefs. Criminal acts targeting vulnerable group should be punished, and we already have laws to do so. People should be punished for illegal acts not thoughts or beliefs.
- 3. Hate crimes laws have serious unintended consequences.** The policing of thought is a serious matter. How can hate crimes laws be enforced without penalizing free speech? In today's culture it is no longer far-fetched for ministers and others to assume that a hate crimes law could develop into a hate speech law as is already the case in Canada and parts of Europe. Activist judges, aggressive prosecutors, uninformed policymakers, and activist organizations can use these laws against places of worship, clergy, and citizens who want to be free to practice their faith according to their sincerely held beliefs. Hate crimes laws are being used to intimidate and threaten criminal penalties against both religious and non-religious persons who wish to peacefully follow the dictates of their conscience.

We see the need for policymakers and other leaders to send the right message by denouncing injustice. Unfortunately, a hate crimes law sends the wrong message. It sends the false message that its passage will prevent hate crimes and protect citizens. Unfortunately, it does neither. We support the just and equal enforcement of our current laws as well as the passage of responsible legislation that will truly protect citizens by preventing violent crimes and punishing offenders for their deeds.

For these and other reasons, we the undersigned oppose the passage of hate crimes laws, and we encourage our state and local policymakers to establish policies and laws that will serve all people and communities of our state in a fair and equitable manner.

Yours truly,

Name _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Leadership Position:

Place of Worship & Position _____

Elected Office _____

Community Leadership Position _____

Other Position _____

Please Return to: **Family Council** • 414 South Pulaski, Suite 2, Little Rock, AR 72201 • (501) 375-7000



Questions and Answers

Who can sign this letter?

Anyone can sign this letter. We encourage faith and community leaders as well as elected officials to sign this letter.

Can this letter be copied and distributed for people to sign?

Yes. We encourage people to copy this letter, distribute it, and encourage many people to sign and return it so their voices can be heard by policymakers.

How will this letter be used?

By signing this letter citizens will be making a public statement and taking a public stand against hate crimes laws. Family Council plans to provide the names of the signers of this letter to policymakers to encourage them to oppose hate crimes laws.

Why is this letter important?

Special interest groups, political leaders, and some clergy are pressuring state lawmakers to pass a hate crimes law. Efforts are also underway at the city and county levels to promote similar measures. Unless elected officials hear from citizens who see the harm in passing a hate crimes law, our policymakers may assume that most people favor the passage of a hate crimes law. This letter encourages lawmakers to avoid passing a law that will not work.

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