

EDITOR'S NOTE: Senator Cardin writes periodic columns for Maryland publications. The following column about legislation to prevent hate crimes may be of interest to your readers. Please contact Susan Sullam at susan_sullam@cardin.senate.gov if you have any questions.

PRECEDE: Senator Cardin is a member of five Senate committees: Foreign Relations, Judiciary, Environment and Public Works, Budget, and Small Business and Entrepreneurship. His web site is: cardin.senate.gov. He also can be found at [YouTube.com/SenatorCardin](https://www.youtube.com/SenatorCardin)

HATE CRIMES STILL PLAGUE OUR NATION

By U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin

The recent killing of a security guard at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. was a stark reminder that hate crimes are still a part of our society. In 2007, the FBI reported more than 7,600 hate crimes throughout the nation, with 153 occurring in Maryland. Unfortunately, this number could be much higher because many hate crimes are never reported by the victims.

Too many Americans have been a target of hate crimes, from racially motivated fire bombings in Charles County to swastikas painted on synagogues and churches in Montgomery County to the brutal beating death of a 25-year old Mexican immigrant in Shenandoah, PA. Hate crimes are acts of violence against people or property that are meant to frighten and intimidate the victim and the entire community. They can have a devastating effect and cannot be tolerated.

Today, current federal hate crime laws are based only on race, color, national origin and religion. Despite the existing laws, we have seen a significant increase in hate crimes, particularly crimes based on gender identity, sexual orientation and disability. It's time to expand the federal definition of a hate crime to cover individuals and groups that have become increasingly targeted.

I am an original co-sponsor of the *Matthew Shepard Hate Crime Prevention Act*, S. 909, which would extend protections to individuals who are targeted because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or disability. It allows for the prosecution of hate crimes wherever they take place, and it would provide greater resources to local, state and tribal governments for hate crime prosecutions and prevention programs.

This legislation does not diminish the role of states in prosecuting criminal activity. Instead, it would assist states by providing them with greater resources to effectively fight hate crimes. Most importantly, the bill protects the First Amendment and does nothing to diminish the right of free speech or the freedom to assemble.

Hate crimes affect all of us, not just the victim. They are intended to intimidate and frighten our communities. It's time to give our law enforcement officials the tools they

need to fight all hate crimes, including those that are based on sexual orientation, gender identity and disability.

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