



For Immediate Release
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SENATOR CARDIN CO-SPONSORS HATE CRIMES AMENDMENT TO DEFENSE BILL

WASHINGTON -- **U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin** (D-MD) today co-sponsored the ***Matthew Shepard Hate Crimes Prevention Act*** as an amendment to the defense authorization bill that is currently under consideration by the Senate. Senator Cardin, an original co-sponsor of the hate crimes bill and a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, has called for greater protections against hate crimes in this nation.

The National Defense Authorization Act would authorize \$679.8 billion in discretionary budget authority for defense programs in Fiscal Year 2010. It includes a base budget request of \$550.2 billion and additional funding of \$130 billion for overseas contingency operations, most of which funds U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“The recent killing of a security guard at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington 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 more than 150 occurring in Maryland. Unfortunately, this number could be much higher because many hate crimes are never reported by the victims. “

Today, current federal hate crime laws only protect victims who are targeted based on race, color, national origin and religion. Existing laws need to be expanded to protect the growing number of hate crime victims who are harmed of gender identity, sexual orientation and disability.

“Hate crimes are acts of violence that meant to frighten and intimidate the victim and the entire community. It is important to note that this amendment fully protects First Amendment Rights, but it expands the federal definitions to cover individuals and groups that have been increasingly targeted. It is time to include in federal statute gender, disability, gender identity, and sexual orientation to make sure all Americans are equally protected against hate crimes. It also is important to ensure the prosecution of hate crimes wherever they take place.”

The amendment authorizes the Attorney General to provide technical, forensic, prosecutorial and other assistance to state, local, and tribal law enforcement officials for hate crime investigations and prosecutions. In addition, the Treasury Department and the Justice Department are authorized to increase personnel to better prevent and respond to allegations of hate crimes. The amendment also authorizes \$5 million for fiscal years 2010 and 2011 for Justice Department grants to state, local, and tribal law enforcement officials

who have incurred extraordinary expenses associated with investigating and prosecuting hate crimes. Finally, the amendment authorizes grants by the Office of Justice Programs to state, local, and tribal programs to combat hate crimes committed by juveniles.

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