

# LGBT Hate Crime Bill Could Face Presidential Veto

## Offenses targeting queer community may gain hate crime status

**Daniel Zarchy**  
World/National Editor

Just weeks after President Bush exercised his veto power for the second time since the

start of his presidency, he may be heading down that path once again.

The president is threatening to veto a bill that would extend hate crimes to include

transgressions against the queer community.

The bill, H.R. 1592: Local Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2007, which passed in the House May 4, would amend the current definition of "hate crime" to include actions committed because of a victim's sexual orientation and gender identity.

Currently, the list of discriminatory biases includes race, religion, ethnicity, and nation of origin.

Under the current system, felonies that are considered hate crimes carry an increase in jail time as well as other penalties, collectively called "penalty enhancements," as opposed to similar crimes that are not based on "bias."

Brad Luma, spokesperson for the Human Rights Campaign, explained that this is because

of the San Francisco Human Rights Committee, said that his organization, a government-run anti-discrimination group, strongly supports the bill.

"When a crime like that is done, it's really saying to the community, 'we're out to get you,'" Brinkin said. "The existence of a law like that, [sends the message] that the United States of America is against these crimes so strongly that we're willing to add extra jail time."

The City and County of San Francisco endorse the bill, acknowledging the detrimental effects of hate crimes on society.

Brinkin added that it was out of character for Republican lawmakers to oppose anything that involved more jail time and that it revealed a deeper prejudice on Bush's part.

crimes bill," said a receptionist at TVC, the only member available to comment.

In a press release, TVC condemned Congress' choice to vote on H.R. 1592 on the National Day of Prayer (May 3), and points out that this legislation creates two new federally-protected minority groups: "sexual orientation" and "gender identity."

According to TVC, these terms are yet undefined by law.

In another press release, TVC states that, "Under a false banner of fighting hate, these liberals have demonstrated that they are the haters and their targets are Americans who believe in God and His teachings."

Jovida Guevara-Ross, executive director of Community United Against Violence, said that while she agreed that

"When a crime like that is done, it's really saying to the community, 'we're out to get you.' The existence of a law like that, [sends the message] that the United States of America is against these crimes so strongly that we're willing to add extra jail time."

**Larry Brinkin,**  
co-manager of the LGBT Division of the San Francisco Human Rights Committee

hate crimes act two-fold.

In addition to the original crime, the acts send a message to the community with the implicit threat that any one of them could be next.

"This is about hate crimes being more than just an attack on an individual. It's meant to terrorize a community of people," Luma said.

H.R. 1592, which still requires Senate and presidential approval, is also known as the Matthew Shepard Act.

Matthew Shepard, 21 at the time, was killed in 1998 after a brutal attack. Russel Henderson and Aaron McKinney, who had targeted Shepard because of his homosexuality, are currently serving life sentences. They were not charged with a hate crime.

Larry Brinkin, co-manager of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) Division

"The threat of a veto is evidence of their bias against the LGBT community," Brinkin said.

The debate in Congress covers many concerns, particularly religion.

"[The bill] will have a chilling effect on religious freedom and First Amendment rights," said Rep. Lamar Smith (R-TX), a ranking member of the House Judiciary Committee, in an address to Congress. "Religious figures and groups will feel in greater jeopardy as a result of this bill."

The Traditional Values Coalition (TVC), the self-proclaimed "largest non-denominational, grassroots church lobby in America," has accused Congress of putting forth a bill they judge to be "anti-Christian."

"We oppose the current hate

the LGBT community should be covered under hate crime legislation, increasing penalties for these crimes has not always effectively deterred violence.

"It is important to recognize hate violence and acknowledge what it is," Guevara-Ross said. "There has been some evidence that penalty enhancement can negatively impact the very communities they were intended to protect. Ending hate violence will take more than penalty enhancements."

Luma believes that the core of this debate lies in looking beyond the law, to the people that hate crimes affect.

He continued, "We do hope that [Bush] takes a moment, meets with families, and looks at his legacy and sees if he wants to be remembered for vetoing a major piece of civil rights legislation."

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