

July 27, 2009

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson
The Honorable Robert Wexler
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Dear Representative Johnson and Representative Wexler:

The undersigned organizations endorse the “Hate Crimes Against the Homeless Statistics Act,” your legislation to extend hate crimes data collection – through the Federal Bureau of Investigation tracking system already in place – to include homeless victims.

Between 1999 and 2007, there have been 218 documented fatal attacks against homeless persons (despite the absence of uniform law enforcement reporting). This far exceeds the number of fatal hate crimes reported in all legally-recognized hate crime categories combined. While some of the attacks were simply a result of homeless persons’ vulnerable position, many were perpetrated due to bias against homeless people. They range from beatings with golf clubs to setting a man on fire while sleeping.

Victims of homeless hate crimes include men, women, children, youth, and veterans. In 2006 alone, the number of attacks against homeless people rose by 65 percent compared to that of 2005. We are alarmed by this accelerating trend.

It is beyond time that we improve our understanding of violent crimes against our fellow Americans due to their homeless status. Rigorous and uniform tracking and reporting of such crimes is the first step in determining future actions to prevent criminal activity.

Hate-motivated crimes against homeless persons instill fear among our homeless neighbors and serve to continue to marginalize them from society. We must learn more about where and when violent crimes against people experiencing homelessness take place, without delay, before harm against them escalates further.

Representatives Johnson and Wexler, we gratefully acknowledge your leadership for introducing the Hate Crimes Against the Homeless Statistics Act. We call on Congress to assure prompt passage of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

National Coalition for the Homeless