

Pro-Family Group Urges Action Against Hate Crimes Bill

✖ **April 27, 2009** – The American Family Association (AFA) is urging Christians to contact their representatives to oppose a bill that would add sexual orientation and gender identity to the list of protected classes under federal hate crimes law.

H.R. 1913, also known as the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act, passed the House Judiciary Committee Thursday by a 15-12 vote. The AFA reported that the bill could be considered by the full House as soon as Wednesday.

While condemning violence against homosexuals, Christian leaders said the bill would inhibit pastors from condemning homosexual behavior and bar speech against the gay lifestyle. They point to hate crime laws in England, Sweden and Canada, where Christians have been prosecuted for calling homosexuality sinful.

“We believe that this is merely the first step in an attempt to suppress all speech that speaks against homosexual conduct,” Michael DePrimo, special counsel to AFA President Tim Wildmon, told *Charisma*.

Although the bill is limited to violence against certain groups of people, DePrimo said exceptions have been made to First Amendment protections, and he believes the courts could one day use the bill to create a hate speech exception.

“The reason we believe this is because homosexuals for years and years have been saying that groups like the American Family Association, Focus on the Family, Family Research Council through their opposition to homosexual conduct are responsible for things like the deaths of homosexual persons

like Matthew Shepard," DiPrimo said, referring to the 21-year-old gay University of Wyoming student who was beaten to death in 1998.

"We believe that the court at some point is going to tie those two together. And just like they did in Canada, we believe the mere speaking out against homosexuality will eventually be considered a crime."

The House passed a similar bill in 2007, which was widely decried by Christian groups. The Senate later attached hate crimes legislation to a defense-spending bill, but it was stripped out during negotiations between the House and Senate. President George W. Bush ultimately vetoed the spending legislation.

The AFA set up a Web site providing phone numbers for each congressional representative along with talking points for the calls.

During debates last week, the House Judiciary Committee rejected amendments to protect ministers from being prosecuted for inciting a hate crime if they preached that homosexuality was sinful, and to clarify the definitions of "gender identity" and "sexual orientation," among other issues, One News Now reported.

Pro-family leaders say the 30 sexual orientations identified by the American Psychiatric Association could be used to determine protected classes. Those orientations include necrophilia, pedophilia and zoophilia.

Although gay rights activists say the bill would crack down on violence against homosexuals, opponents of the measure say existing hate crime laws in 45 states can effectively prosecute such crimes.

The AFA's call comes as Iowa county clerks on Monday began

processing marriage licenses for gay couples. After the state Supreme Court ruling on April 3, Iowa became the third state to currently permit gay marriage. Although the state usually requires a three-day waiting period for marriages, Iowa judges can waive that and allow immediate weddings, the Associated Press (AP) reported.

The Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law estimated that Iowa had 5,800 same-sex couples in 2005, and it predicted last year that 2,900 couples would marry in the first three years if gay marriage were legalized, the AP said. Based on trends in other states that allow gay marriage, the institute expected roughly 55,000 same-sex couples to travel to Iowa to marry within three to five years.

The 1996 Defense of Marriage Act protects other states from having to recognize same-sex marriages.