

What is the Matthew Shepard Hate Prevention Act (S.909)?

This bill strengthens current hate crimes legislation by making it easier to investigate and prosecute incidents that occur. The Act does away with certain limitations that prevent greater federal involvement in the investigation and prosecution of bias-motivated crimes. It also increases the scope of federal hate crimes laws to include those motivated by the victim's disability, gender identity, gender, or sexual orientation. This bill would allow the federal government to play a greater role in providing resources and support to the local law enforcement agencies addressing hate crimes.

How specifically does it change the current law against hate crimes?

The bill strengthens current hate crimes laws in two primary ways:

- *Removes the "federally protected activity" limitation:* Currently, the federal government can only investigate and prosecute bias-motivated incidents in cases where the victim was attacked *because s/he was engaging in a federally-protected activity*, such as serving on a jury or going to school. This bill would remove such restrictions and allow the federal government to be involved in cases where hate crimes occur in other settings.
- *Expands the definition of a "hate crime":* Currently, federal law defines a hate crime as incidents where an individual was targeted because of his/her actual or perceived race, color, religion or national origin. This bill would expand that definition to include crimes motivated by the victim's actual or perceived disability, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

How will this bill impact the South Asian community?

South Asians have long grappled with bias and discrimination in the form of hate crimes. These include violence and murders perpetrated by racist gangs against the South Asian community in New Jersey during the 1980s; the wave of hate crimes following 9/11, particularly against Muslims and Sikhs; and homophobia that members of the South Asian lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) communities face. Strong legislation that allows greater resources and authority for the federal government to step in to investigate and prosecute hate crimes will protect, not only individuals affected by hate crimes, but the entire community.

What can we do to help pass the bill?

Call your Senator today! Ask them to support the Matthew Shepard Hate Crimes Prevention Act (S. 909).