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Sarah Clark, Secretary

TO: House Committee on Judiciary
FROM: Angela Lasso-Jimenez, Policy & Research Analyst, Office of Racial Equity
DATE: Monday January 03, 2025
RE: Testimony of the Office of Racial Equity on H.118, An act relating to expanding the scope of hate-motivated crimes

Chair LaLonde and Members of the Committee:

The Office of Racial Equity remains concerned about the rise in hate crimes in Vermont and their impact on our communities. While we support efforts to strengthen hate crime laws, several factors must be considered to ensure this legislation effectively protects everybody.

Historically excluded communities in the state experience fear and anxiety when hate crimes occur. In November 2023, three Palestinian students were shot in Burlington while speaking Arabic and wearing traditional Palestinian cloths known as *keffiyehs* (Duster, 2023). While this case was not officially ruled a hate crime, the incident spread fear throughout Vermont's Arab and Muslim communities. Many questioned their safety in what they considered home. In Barre, a documented hate crime occurred when a Latin@ family faced racial threats, property damage, and harassment due to their perceived national origin (Madani, 2020). This is a stark example of how hate manifests in our state. According to the Department of Justice (2022), hate crimes in Vermont have increased from 41 incidents in 2021 to 52 in 2022, with race-based crimes rising from 30 to 34 incidents. It is important to note that, as in many other parts of the country, these figures are likely massively undercounted because they only reflect incidents that [a] were reported, and [b] were officially deemed to be hate crimes. Research demonstrates that crimes against persons are often unreported due to the victim's shame, distrust of the system, or fear of retaliation (Wilkin 2024; Erentzen & Schuller 2020). We also know that not every bias-motivated incident is ruled a hate crime, leading to inconsistency and skepticism in the public's perception of how crimes are interpreted and resolved by investigators.

Hate crimes also have economic implications that cannot be ignored. As Vermont seeks to attract new residents and businesses, we must consider how hate crimes affect our ability to welcome a more diverse talent pool. Making Vermont truly inclusive is not just morally correct, it is economically vital for our state's future.

When someone commits a hate crime, they target what a person *represents* to them, affecting everyone who shares that identity or belongs to that group. **The Office supports the shift toward**

person-centric terminology in H.118, especially because hate crimes not only impact individuals, but also send a message of fear to entire communities. However, this is one step in a long line of steps that need to be taken to dismantle racism and prevent hate crimes to happen.

Thank you for your consideration.

Source

Duster, C. (November 29, 2023). Hate crimes explained: Could suspect who shot 3 Palestinian students be charged with a hate crime? *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/11/29/us/hate-crime-explained-vermont-palestinian-shooting-reaaj/index.html>

Erentzen, C. & Schuller, R. (2020) Exploring the dark figure of hate: Experiences with police bias and the under-reporting of hate crime. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 62(2), 64–97

Madani, D. (2020) Vermont man sentenced in hate crime after threatening to set fire to Hispanic neighbors. *NBC News*. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/vermont-man-sentenced-hate-crime-after-threatening-set-fire-hispanic-n1246066>

U.S. Department of Justice (2022). Hate Crime Statistics for Vermont. <https://web.archive.org/web/20240620092837/https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/state-data/vermont>

Wilkin, D. (2024) Which Way to Turn. *International Journal of Disability and Social Justice*. 2024. Vol. 4(3):23-42. DOI: 10.13169/intljofdissocjus.4.3.0023

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