



Oregon

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Oregon Commission on Black Affairs
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Testimony in support of HB 3480
April 16, 2013
House Judiciary Committee

Chair Barker, Vice Chairs Garrett and Krieger, and Representatives Brent, Cameron, Hicks, Olson, Tomei, and Williamson:

For the Record, My Name is Robin Morris Collin. I am a professor of law at Willamette University College of Law. I deeply appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today, and I appreciate your time and attention to this matter.

You have heard the stories, the anecdotal evidence of hate crimes from the victims. I applaud the courage of the victims who have attended today to tell you their stories again, in person. You have also heard the statistical evidence about bias crimes. They are real, and they are a threat that affects people of color, as well as women, and lesbian, gay, transgendered and bisexual people of this state. I am here to add a prosecutorial perspective on these crimes. Before entering law teaching, I was a prosecutor for Maricopa County in the State of Arizona. I have brought my badge with me today because I am proud of the work that I did enforcing the laws. As a prosecutor, speaking from that experience, I offer some additional perspective about bias crimes.

Bias crimes target communities, not just individuals. As such, they have broad impacts on the sense of safety of a community, not just an individual. They are intended to impact more than the direct victim. As such, they are easily identifiable because their purpose is to tell people of a certain ethnicity or orientation where they may and may not be. This is contrary to the promise of our democracy and citizenship that holds forth the promise of freedom to be, to live and to work where we choose.

These crimes deliberately threaten the right of our communities to congregate, to socialize, and to express political opinions. If you will listen to the expressions of emotion by the people of Boston today, you will find virtually no difference between them and the victims who have testified today: they are afraid to occupy the places and spaces we are all free to occupy. That threat is terrorism, by any name.

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The people who do this are extraordinarily dangerous people. They are a real and present threat to people of color, and others; they are a threat to all of our communities because once set in motion, their violent acts have no respect for children, wealth, status, or any other characteristic. These people have demonstrated a known propensity for personal violence. That propensity is not confined easily. These people are threats to our communities, and our democracies. They should not be dealt with casually, leniently. For our mutual safety, they should be tracked, and punished for the danger they truly represent.

In addition, have intergenerational impacts as well. These Crimes of targeting people of color become part of the cautionary tales passed from Parent to child, and from generation to generation. Even Attorney General Holder has spoken of giving “The Talk” to his son. This is not a lecture about reasonable caution or ordinary prudence. It is a warning from parent to child, grandparent to grandchild, and beyond that if you are black in this state, you wear a target on your back. This is a talk no American should ever have to give in a country committed to freedom and equal treatment. It is no small matter. It undermines whole systems of family, and community, and country, as well as the intimate personal psychology of individuals targeted in this way.

These individuals are extraordinarily dangerous; this crime is the equivalent of domestic terrorism and should be treated as such. These people are a threat to all of us, and I urge you to pass HB 3480.

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