

THE OFFICE OF THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY
YOUTH GOVERNOR WILLIAM HUANG
ATTORNEY GENERAL:
MADDI WALSH



Dear Delegates,

In reflecting upon the current divided state of our nation and the malicious events that transpired in Charlottesville in 2017, it is critical that we work to understand and ameliorate the tragic existence of hate crimes within our own state.

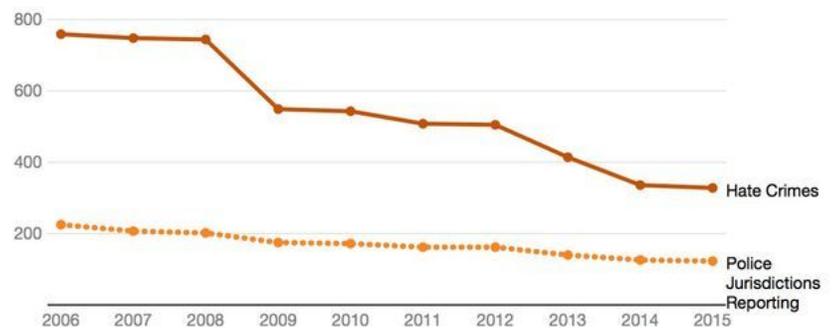
The Division of Criminal Justice of the Office of the NJ Attorney General defines “bias crime” as “...crimes motivated by prejudice against others based on race, color, religion, sexual orientation, gender, disability or ethnicity,” but the standing definition is vague and lacks clarity. How does one determine if a defining characteristic is the primary motivation behind criminal action, and to what degree must it be proven? Hate crimes have significant symbolic consequences along with physical and legal repercussions; the lack of a definition which concisely and clearly identifies what constitutes a crime based on hate can lead to immense subjectivity in prosecuting dangerous and criminal action.

Hate crimes are also severely underreported in New Jersey, another issue that prevents them from being proactively prevented. In 2015, for example, 328 hate crimes occurred statewide. However, only 123 out of 508 New Jersey police departments actually reported any crimes.

Currently, there is no official punishment for law enforcement agencies that neglect to adequately report the number of bias-related crimes taking place under their jurisdiction, nor is there any standard for auditing reported hate crime data. Victims of legitimate hate crimes are being denied justice, and there is no way to determine whether or not crimes reported to police districts are legitimately hate-based.

N.J. hate crimes vs. police departments reporting

Over the last 10 years, both the number of hate crimes reported by police and the number of police departments reporting any at all has dropped by about half. Without any monitoring, there is no way of knowing if this is reflective of the truth.



Furthermore, New Jersey is home to a number of hate groups who perpetrate bias crimes and create tension in diverse and minority communities. The Southern Poverty Law Center estimates that over 48 unique organized groups with malicious and discriminatory intent exist in New Jersey, and NJ ranks 2nd behind California nation-wide when it comes to the number of hate groups per capita. While many hate crimes are committed by “lone-wolf” attackers, organized groups play a significant role in the spread of hateful ideologies.

When looking to combat the issues surrounding hate crimes and hateful ideology in New Jersey, delegates should seek to clarify the existing definition of “bias crime” that the Division of Criminal Justice currently works off of. They should also try to create legislation which adds more uniform structure to the process of prosecuting hate crimes, and reduces the number of crimes which go unreported. Additionally, education is a key issue to bring to light when discussing solutions to the spread of hate crimes. Delegates should aim to consider how they can stop the problem at its root cause through addressing negative stereotypes, as well as addressing colloquial hate speech without violating the freedom of speech guaranteed to all U.S. citizens.

The Cabinet and I cannot wait to see what ideas delegates will bring to conference, and the unique solutions which they will present to make New Jersey a more tolerant and peaceful state!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maddi Walsh". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Maddi Walsh
Attorney General

Sources:

Data Regarding Underreporting of Hate Crimes in New Jersey

http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2016/11/nj_hate_crime_data_is_almost_completely_useless.html

New Jersey Attorney General’s Guide to Identifying Hate Crimes

<http://www.nj.gov/oag/bias/downloads/OBCCR-guide-022317-pages.pdf>

Existence of Hate Groups in New Jersey

<https://www.njtvonline.org/news/video/bias-crimes-expert-says-new-jersey-has-dozens-of-hate-groups/>

How Specific Biases and Inequalities Contribute to Statewide Hate Crime

http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2016/12/the_state_of_hate_how_bias_persists_in_nj.html