

# Judiciary Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-6872

**Title:** AN ACT REVISING AND CONSOLIDATING THE HATE CRIMES STATUTES.

**Vote Date:** 4/4/2025

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 3/10/2025

**File No.:** 763

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## SPONSORS OF BILL:

Request of the Governor Pursuant to Joint Rule 9

## CO-SPONSORS:

Rep. Geraldo C. Reyes, 75th Dist.

## REASONS FOR BILL:

To make it easier for law enforcement officials and prosecutors to reference hate crime laws throughout the Connecticut General Statutes, this legislation aims to consolidate all the statutes related to hate crimes into one chapter of the General Statutes.

## SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language makes various technical and definitional revisions throughout the bill, including to the definition of “protected social category” in section 1, fixing a drafting error in section 5 regarding the penalty provision, and removing the former section 14 from the bill, which pertained to wearing a mask and/or hood. The language also consolidates sections 24 and 25 into a new section 23.

## RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

**Ned Lamont, Governor of Connecticut:** Governor Lamont supports this legislation because the hate crime laws are inconsistent, making it difficult for police and prosecutors to enforce them. This makes the state less safe, especially smaller individual communities that fall victim to these particularly heinous crimes. The consolidation of all of Connecticut's hate crimes laws into one act, with the goal of creating one hate crimes chapter in the General Statutes, will simplify statutes and make it easier for police and prosecutors to charge and prosecute

these crimes. He hopes to see the state continue to lead the nation in fighting hate crime by passing laws like this one.

**William Tong, CT Attorney General:** Attorney General Tong supports this legislation because currently, there are 20 separate hate crime statutes that were created over the course of 100 years, making it very difficult to prosecute these crimes. This creates confusion because the statutes differ on who is protected, and which crimes are covered by which statute. This law streamlines hate crimes, ensures protected social categories are uniformly encompassed in the protection of our laws, consolidates 20 statutes into one, and resolves the inconsistencies that still exist.

**Judicial Branch, External Affairs Division:** The Judicial branch is concerned by multiple provisions of this legislation as drafted and would like the opportunity to further discuss this bill. They do, however, support all the efforts of the Hate Crimes Advisory Council.

**Deborah Del Prete Sullivan, Legal Counsel, Director, Office of Chief Public Defender:** Deborah Del Prete Sullivan is opposed to this legislation as drafted because she is concerned that the bill dissects the elements of the current hate crime statutes; it divides them into two separate offenses, adds mandatory minimum sentences and substantial enhanced sentences to the statutory schemes. They also have concerns that this could impact an individual's first amendment rights.

**Amy Meyerson (Esq.), Co-Chair, CT Hate Crimes Advisory Council:** Amy Meyerson, on behalf of the CT Hate Crimes Advisory Council, supports this legislation because it puts the state's hate crime statutes into their own chapter of the Penal Code. This addresses four main issues they've identified: separate and inconsistent statutes, ineffectiveness for serious crimes, the fact that they are not currently called "hate crimes", and the current intent standards are confusing and unworkable.

**Natasha Pierre (Esq.), State Office of the Victim Advocate:** Natasha Pierre and the Office of the Victim Advocate are in support of this legislation because hate crimes have been increasing year over year since 2021 and they attribute this to the lack of clear and consistent hate crime laws. This law would hold those who engage in hate crimes accountable for their actions.

**Kathryn Bare, Chief States' Attorney, Division of Criminal Justice:** Kathryn Bare supports this legislation because it provides law enforcement and courts with the tools to hold perpetrators of hate crimes accountable. By strengthening the hate crime laws, this bill sends the message that CT will not tolerate hate crimes of any kind.

**Ronnell Higgins, Commissioner, Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection:** Commissioner Higgins supports this legislation because currently, the hate crime laws are scattered across 21 sections of the general statutes; this fragmentation has created confusion, making it more difficult for law enforcement and prosecutors to hold offenders accountable. Yearly hate crimes have risen 50% since 2021 and these laws can help to prevent this, reducing the number of hate crimes and keeping our state safer.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**Sachin Pandya, Richard Wilson, Professors, UConn Law:** Professors Pandya and Wilson support this legislation because Connecticut's hate crimes statutes are scattered across the general statutes, which makes it more difficult to prosecute. This bill consolidates the existing hate crime statutes into one place in the Penal Code which makes the law clearer and more consistent in what it requires and who it protects.

**Robert Yass, Officer and Director, Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford:** Robert Yass supports this legislation because it will serve the positive purposes of consolidating the various CT hate statutes into one chapter of the Penal Code and will make these various provisions consistent with each other and clearly identified. Amid rising antisemitism, this is necessary to protect the local Jewish community from antisemitic hate crimes.

**Stacey Sobel (Esq.), Regional Director, ADL CT:** Stacey Sobel supports this legislation because the ADL is committed to being on the front lines to combat antisemitism. The ADL crafted the first model hate crime law in the US, and works to encourage and help promote the further passing of laws that can combat antisemitism.

**Chris Ferace, Putnam CT Chief of Police, CT Police Chiefs Association:** Chief Chris Ferace and the CPCA support this legislation because he believes the new statutes are far simpler to apply, comprehend, and clarify the elements of "hate crimes" in the new revisions. These revisions make the statutes far clearer for CT police officers to enforce and charge individuals with a hate crime. Currently, the hate crime statutes are difficult to enforce, which burdens police.

**Robin Kipnis, Grassroots Jewish Movement of Connecticut:** Robin Kipnis supports this legislation because of the rise in hate crimes throughout the state. Currently, the hate crime statutes are very disorganized which makes it very difficult to hold perpetrators accountable. This bill gathers the provisions dealing with bias and bigotry under one section of the criminal statutes and clarifies inconsistencies and provisions of what is and isn't a hate crime.

**Ari Schaffer, Greater Hartford for Israel:** Ari Schaffer and Greater Hartford for Israel support this legislation because they believe it will help to address hate crimes, specifically of an antisemitic nature, which have been on the rise over recent years here in Connecticut. Action to clarify hate crime laws in this state will help to provide assurance to the Jewish community that there is legal infrastructure in place to protect them from targeted hate.

**Norman Sondheimer:** Norman Sondheimer supports this legislation because he believes it will help to combat the rise in antisemitic hate crimes. He believes that this proposed legislation would make existing statute more accessible and enforceable, ensuring law enforcement, attorneys, and judges can more effectively bring justice to victims.

**Laurie Feldman:** Laurie Feldman supports this legislation because she believes it would signify that hate crimes victimize entire communities in addition to individual targets. Deterring hate crimes and showing heightened public awareness benefits all citizens and this bill seeks to do just that.

**Alexandra Gizhitsa:** Alexandra Gizhitsa supports this legislation because she believes it will enable the state to better combat the seven groups in this state that she has identified as

extremist, violent, and problematic. She states that these groups pose a threat to everyone's daily life, especially to the Jewish community, and believes this bill would bring a lot of clarity to hate crime legislation to protect the most at risk groups.

**Meira Goldman:** Meira Goldman supports this legislation because she feels that anyone opposed to legislation proposing clear and concise definitions of hate crimes have lots to lose from people understanding what is classified as a hate crime.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

**Chelsea-Infinity Gonzalez, Public Policy and Advocacy Director, ACLU:** Chelsea-Infinity Gonzalez is opposed to this legislation because of the potential unintended consequences that could inadvertently undermine the very civil liberties it aims to protect or exacerbate disparities in the criminal legal system. They are concerned specifically with the provisions that constitute a threat, as well as some of the sentencing requirements.

**Theodore Koch III, President, CT Criminal Defense Lawyers' Association:** Theodore Koch opposes this legislation because of the replacement of the term "maliciously" with "intentionally." He is also opposed because of the potential resultant "stacking" of charges, as well as all enhanced penalties and the applicability of these offenses to situations of domestic violence.

**Connecticut Hospital Association:** The CHA opposes section 16 of this legislation because it establishes a new hate crime if a person acts in violation of existing public accommodations laws, without specifying a level of intentionality. Section 16 does not specify a level of intentionality, or mens rea.

**Cristher Estrada-Perez:** Cristher Estrada-Perez is opposed to this legislation because they feel that it will not effectively address hate crimes but instead increase state repression against marginalized communities.

**Cameron Aiken:** Cameron Aiken opposes this legislation because he feels that it would allow for over policing of marginalized neighborhoods and will negatively impact political activism by allowing those in power to crush and punish dissent.

**Michael Espelin:** Michael Espelin is opposed to this legislation because he believes it would lead to over policing. He has seen firsthand, as a medical provider, the impact law enforcement encounters have on people and believes that it could constitute PTSD. Enabling more police action will only lead to more PTSD.

**Nancy Bowden:** Nancy Bowden opposes this legislation because she sees this as an effort to stand with President Trump to crush political dissent and this is especially unnecessary for protests in support of matters overseas, and not at home.

**Isabella DeAssis:** Isabella DeAssis is opposed to this legislation because she sees it as a bill enabling increased police presence among marginalized communities, which can be done in a manner that would repress political activism statewide.

**Amara E.:** Amara E. is opposed to this legislation because she views it as an attack on the Free Palestine movement across the state. She believes it will only serve to protect Jews and Jewish ideology.

**Eric Goodman:** Eric Goodman is opposed to this legislation because he sees it as a violation of first amendment rights to free speech and assembly.

**Karolina Kopek:** Karolina Kopek opposes this legislation because it risks fostering a dangerous precedent by protecting political ideology and occupation, and it also has the potential to increase police repression, further marginalizing activists, and deepening societal divisions.

**Daniel Piper:** Daniel Piper is opposed to this legislation because it would allow police to further oppress marginalized communities and be used to further repress opposition activists, organizers, and protestors.

**Layan Alnajjar:** Layan Alnajjar is opposed to this legislation because they believe it would be declaring that some voices, specifically pro Palestine voices, should be marginalized and silenced in the name of free speech.

**Jamie Smith:** Jamie Smith is opposed to this legislation because they believe it would sanction increased policing that would disproportionately target people of color and silence political activism that does not agree with the agenda of the current administration.

**Adam Bulmash, HJOC, CTSW4P:** Adam Bulmash opposes this legislation because he believes it is intended to target those who protest in support of Palestine. He believes this bill will go on to suppress further political dissent.

**Miriam Liske-Doorandish:** Miriam Liske-Doorandish opposes this legislation because she believes it is intended to target those who protest in support of Palestine. She opposes giving law enforcement additional resources to protect the Jewish community from antisemitic hate crimes and believes that she and others must be protected from being called antisemitic.

**Sohail Lokhandwalla:** Sohail Lokhandwalla opposes this legislation because he feels it targets the pro-Palestine movement in CT. He does not believe additional laws or penalties should be imposed on those who commit hate crimes because it will not stop or prevent bigotry.

**Sarah Pimenta:** Sarah Pimenta is opposed to this legislation because it could represent a repression in first amendment rights. This bill could criminalize people who protest in support of Palestine and won't prevent hate crimes.

**Erin Rizzie:** Erin Rizzie is opposed to this legislation because it violates the first amendment rights of pro-Palestine protestors, who are the ones who need protections from police brutality and repercussions. She believes that stricter penalties won't do anything to address the underlying issue and will only further criminalize pro-Palestine protestors.

**Rachel Schmidt:** Rachel Schmidt is opposed to this legislation because expanding hate crime protections to include political ideology and occupation shifts focus away from

protection of people. The bill would enable the selective targeting of organizers and activists for participating in dissent and protest which undermines their first amendment rights.

**Anonymous:** This anonymous individual expresses opposition to the anti-masking provisions because Covid and other diseases could spread at protests, and it prevents police from using facial recognition technology against protestors.

**Anonymous:** This anonymous letter expresses opposition to this legislation because the author believes it is an attack on the rights of CT residents to protest, especially those protesting in favor of Palestine. They believe people of color are most at risk because they are already subject to increased surveillance and police brutality.

**Anonymous:** This anonymous testimony expresses opposition to this legislation because they believe it would lead to increased legal retaliation against protestors advocating for social justice. They are also disturbed by the provision that bans the wearing of masks at protests as this specifically targets protestors in support of Palestine.

**Anonymous:** This testimony is submitted in opposition to sections 53a and 53b specifically. They feel that wearing a mask should not be criminal as people protesting should have the right to privacy and anonymity when protesting. There is also a public safety element to this as masks can prevent the spread of diseases.

**Anonymous:** This testimony is submitted in opposition to this legislation because it would allow for an increased presence among marginalized communities. This could enable law enforcement to further repress protestors, organizers, and activists across the state.

**Anonymous:** This testimony is submitted in opposition to this legislation because they feel that this law is meant to suppress pro Palestine movements.

**Anonymous:** This testimony is submitted in opposition to this legislation because they feel that this bill risks fostering a dangerous precedent by protecting political ideology and occupation, and it sets the path to increase police brutality and further marginalize minority communities.

**Reported by:** Griffin Olshan

**Date:** April 9, 2025