



April 27, 2009

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of thousands of clergy members, pastors, and African American community leaders within our African American Ministers In Action (AAMIA) network of People For The American Way, I urge you to support the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009 (LLEHCPA) – H.R. 1913.

As people of color, we are well aware of the hideous nature of race-based violence, and understand the importance of legislation that protects Americans who are victims of hate crimes. We also are not blind to the fact that violent hate crimes are motivated not just by racism. Knowing this, as clergy members and pastors who affirm the humanity of every person, we fully understand and embrace the call to advocate for an inclusive federal law that will extend protection to victims of hate crimes based on disability, sexual orientation, gender, or gender identity. H.R. 1913 is the bill that will make equal protection under the law for victims of hate crimes a reality and not just an American dream.

Unfortunately, propaganda and lies have prevented the protections that H.R. 1913 proposes from becoming law. One such falsehood is that this bill will eliminate churches' first amendment rights; that this legislation will "muzzle our pulpits" or dictate what we as clergy or religious communities can or cannot say. This is not true. In fact, H.R. 1913 protects freedom of speech and freedom of religion. It only punishes violent acts like assault and murder, not religious beliefs. The law makes clear that it cannot be used to prohibit any "expressive conduct" or "activities protected by the Constitution."

The AAMIA is passionate about protecting the civil rights of all Americans, especially those that protect people who are discriminated against because of who they are. Victims of violent hate crimes often come to our churches in search of a safe haven from enduring assaults, and they are in need of federal protections. Thus from our houses of worship to your house of policy, we trust that we can count on your support for the protection of American citizens from violent hate crimes. Please vote in favor of H.R. 1913.

Sincerely,

Rev. Timothy McDonald
Founder and Chair, African American Ministers In Action