

This letter to the editor was published in "Episcopal Life" in 2005(?).

Expand hate-crime coverage

In 2003, the latest year for which the FBI released statistics, there were 9,100 reported hate-crime victims in the United States, of whom 52 percent were victimized due to race. Victims of religious and sexual-orientation bias tied for second place at 16 percent. Of course, hate crimes are notoriously underreported, especially by gay people, many of whom are closeted and do not trust law enforcement.

The FBI defines hate crimes as those motivated by bias against race, religion, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation -- and investigates all of those categories except sexual orientation. There is no federal hate-crime law covering sexual orientation that would give the feds jurisdiction to investigate. Keep statistics? Yes. Investigate? No.

The Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act, a federal hate-crime bill covering sexual orientation, languishes in our far-right Congress. Is this the compassionate conservatism we were promised? And the state hate-crime laws that do exist are simply inadequate. As one whose life has twice been threatened and who has been verbally gay-bashed more times than I could remember, I say there can be no reason why my life and welfare are not as worthy of safeguarding as is that of other minorities.

Douglas Marshall-Steele
Milton, Del.