

TESTIMONY REGARDING HOUSE BILL 1353

HATE CRIMES

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PARENTS FLAG

I represent Parents FLAG, an organization devoted to strengthening families by assisting them in understanding and accepting their gay and lesbian children. PFLAG is an international group with over 200 chapters and contacts in all 50 states, Canada, Europe, Japan, Israel, Australia and South America. I am a mother of a gay son.

Parents FLAG views the Hate Crimes Bill as offering the same protection for our children that every other citizen takes for granted. Our country seemingly values freedom for its citizens except for our gay and lesbian children.

Our gay children are not the only ones suffering bias. In 1983, I testified as a representative of PFLAG before Harrisburg City Council in support of a non-discrimination ordinance. I wholeheartedly supported the gay community in public testimony. Because of my affirmation of the gay and lesbian community, my apartment building mailboxes and stairwell were set afire with lighter fluid. An individual deliberately set the fire and left Bible tracts in the lobby. The police and fire departments determined the arson act was targeted towards me because of my public support of gay people.

My son was also a victim of Hate Crimes. In 1982, he was an undergraduate student at Mansfield University of Pennsylvania. He was profiled by a local newspaper for his efforts in organizing a gay student group. For months afterward, my son feared for his life because he received telephone death threats, face-to-face campus confrontations and was called numerous vile terms. All of this simply for being a gay person.

Clearly, this Hate Crimes Bill would provide an incentive to report similar crimes and possibly offer some deterrent to individuals who feel it is acceptable to persecute others based solely on sexual orientation.