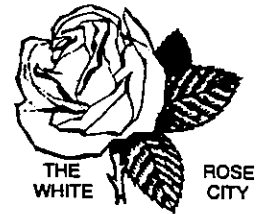




The City of York, Pennsylvania



YORK CITY HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

225 EAST PRINCESS STREET
YORK, PENNSYLVANIA 17403

(717) 846-2926

Pennsylvania House of Representatives
House Judiciary Committee
Special Task Force on Hate Crimes, Terrorism and Arson
House Box 202217
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2217
Attn: James G. Mann

DATE: October 18, 1996
TO: The Honorable Jere Schuler, Task Force Chairman and all members
FROM: Stephen W. Busch, Executive Director - York City Human Relations Commission
RE: Testimony for distribution to the Special Task Force on Hate Crimes, Terrorism & Arson at the public hearing set for October 22, 1996.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the House Judiciary Committee's Special Task Force on Hate Crimes, Terrorism and Arson for allowing us the opportunity to submit written comments on the topic for consideration in its deliberations. As the Special Task Force is soliciting information relating to the history, current status and trends of hate-related, ethnically or racially motivated crime, arson or terrorism, here are some of my thoughts.

York City is experiencing difficulties similar to other third class cities throughout Pennsylvania. York is located in a semi-rural community of 350,000 people. We have also experienced, over the seven years of my tenure as Executive Director of the York City Human Relations Commission, significant acts of ethnic intimidation, hate crimes, and an act of civil disobedience. We suffered from organized hate group activity throughout the community as well.

I. ENHANCEMENT LEGISLATION NEEDS TO BE EXPANDED

We support the advocacy of the spokespeople at this hearing. We support the hate crimes legislation that has been passed and support the inclusion of sexual orientation as an underlying motivation for an enhancement penalty, as we are sure others have said.

The purpose and intent of hate crimes legislation, which is codified in the ethnic intimidation and institutional vandalism statutes, acknowledges the most-esteemed value that our society gives to certain institutions such as our churches, synagogues, mosques, government buildings, cemeteries and such.



Similarly, our hate crimes legislation acknowledges that when the underlying motivation for a crime is the hatred of the race, ethnicity or national origin of the individual that the crime has an impact on society as a whole. Such acts harm not only the individual but can create fear in others of that protected class.

As one example, there was a 75-year old Jewish lady in Hanover who was reluctant to participate in Hanover United because she was afraid of the organized hate group activity that was symbolized in a white supremacist march in the Hanover area. Even though the individual members who marched had no knowledge of this woman, her name or address, her fear was real.

II. STATE FUNDING FOR LOCAL EFFORTS

The legislature should fund and encourage local communities like York and York County to be able to create their own solutions to problems of hate group activity. As others who have made presentations to you before, we had an egregious act of institutional vandalism to a synagogue in York County. In addition to the yeoman police work and the enforcement of the enhancement penalty by the District Attorney's office, our community responded, too. Not only was the synagogue and its congregation affected by this egregious act, the community as a whole suffered.

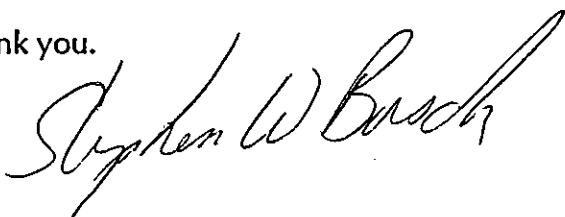
The Rabbi invited the whole community to join the congregation in healing from this attack that affected everyone. This positive reaction to a hate crime can be duplicated throughout the state as it is duplicated throughout York County. York County has a significant number of Unity Coalition efforts that provide technical assistance for positive responses to such negative activity in the community.

In response, the legislature can help by providing funding in any amount to allow local communities to create their own solutions to respond to hate group activity. Typically, Unity Coalition efforts that are effective are not formal, not-for-profit institutionally-based groups. Rather, they are loose associations of people which include members from religious groups, schools, police departments, local elected and municipal officials, and community volunteers. The core members who participate on a on-going monthly basis are often very small and work to develop activities for sharing the values of diversity, equality and non-violence. Yet, this core group represents and keeps informed a much larger group ready to respond to tension situations surrounding bigotry.

One way to fund this group is to fund these movements through local civil rights enforcement agencies enabled through the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act. Statewide mandates are less effective than local efforts. Local groups can respond more cost-effectively, more quickly, and have more credibility in local communities. The solutions you create on a statewide level may not be appropriate for every community. What works in Philadelphia may not be appropriate for York City, or vice versa.

I have great respect for and a deeply-felt belief that average, ordinary people can create their own solutions to the most difficult problems. All we ever need is a little technical assistance, a little bit of money (not a lot), and the freedom to own the responsibility to make our own communities the best places they can be.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Stephen W. Brach". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "S".