



Legislation Text

File #: 15128, **Version:** 1

Fiscal Note

No appropriation required.

Title

Condemning hate speech and hate-motivated violence.

Body

WHEREAS, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and Seeking Tolerance and Justice Over Hate (STAJOH) stand together in solidarity to speak out against a growing epidemic of hate speech and hate-motivated violence, and the recent growth of hate groups throughout the country; and,

WHEREAS, Dr. King once said, "What affects one of us, affects all of us." and the EOC and STAJOH speak with one voice, pledging to stand up against the perpetrators of hate crimes and proponents of hate to the full extent allowable under the rule of law; and,

WHEREAS, on June 10, 2009, a lone gunman invaded the sacred space of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC and the gunman murdered a security guard, Stephen T. Johns, while spreading resonant trauma to over two thousand museum visitors; and,

WHEREAS, Mr. Johns showed extraordinary bravery in preventing the assailant's entry into the museum; an action that likely saved countless other innocent lives. He leaves behind a wife and young son; and,

WHEREAS, the EOC and STAJOH ask members of the greater Madison community to give generously to a fund, which has been established and will be administered locally by the Madison Jewish Community Council, as a means of helping ensure his surviving family's future financial security; and,

WHEREAS, Mr. Johns' alleged killer has a long history of Holocaust denial, anti-Semitic conspiracy theory, and racist hate speech on the web and in other writings and when the record of this tragedy is reviewed many years from now, it is hoped that the perpetrator's name will be long forgotten, but that the name of security guard Stephen T. Johns will be long remembered; and,

WHEREAS, this hate crime does not exist in isolation and it follows the murder two weeks ago, in Wichita, of Dr. George Tiller in his church by a gunman who could not see the moral contradiction inherent in the cold-blooded taking of another person's life in the perverse name of what the gunman seemingly considers preserving a life; and,

WHEREAS, many of the perpetrators do not belong to a specific extremist group or organization, but seem to be motivated to commit violence by their own radical ideologies which may be influenced by current events and conditions, including the economic crisis, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the immigration debate, the gay marriage debate, and the election of Barack Obama as the first African-American president; and,

WHEREAS, Mr. Johns' murder happened at a time when the virulence of hate speech targeted at our nation's first African-American president is an increasing presence on the Internet and over the airwaves, and when members of ethnic and religious minorities are being wrongfully blamed for this country's ills at a time of severe economic downturn and we are complicit if we greet such hate speech with silence; and,

WHEREAS, some would use the precious American right to free speech as a shield to protect and justify

words that misrepresent and divide, the EOC and STAHOH pledge to vigorously and responsibly make use of our own First Amendment freedoms, aggressively countering the poison of hate speech with the antidote of more free speech that uplifts rather than denigrates our common humanity; and,

WHEREAS, for anyone in our community who experiences physical harm or intimidation in the face of hate or a hate crime, the EOC and STAHOH offer their community's passionate and unequivocal support. The EOC and STAHOH recognize the humiliation and resonant trauma that might accompany certain hate crimes, and pledge to use our community's law enforcement resources and other institutions to ease the way for those directly and indirectly affected by these crimes in every way possible; and,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that community leaders pledge to speak out in the face of injustice, while holding high community values that encourage civility, understanding and compassion for All and recognize that the forces of hatred and intolerance exist in every community - including our own; and,

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that in coming together with this statement of solidarity and community values, our city leaders assert our common belief in the golden rule that is woven into virtually every major world religion and secular philosophy, "to do unto others as you would have them do unto you" and while we can never hope to fully eliminate the hate that is within our midst, we can hope to overwhelm it with the light of our own truth, and our dedicated and unwavering commitment to the common good and the ongoing quest for social justice for all.