



TESTIMONY OF STEVE GINSBURG
ADL CONNECTICUT REGIONAL DIRECTOR
IN SUPPORT OF CONNECTICUT SB 122

I would like to thank Chairwoman Horn, Chairman Bradley, Vice-Chairs Osten and Paolillo, Ranking Members Champagne and Green and Members of the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Security for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 122: *An Act Establishing a Unit Within the Division of State Police to Investigate Hate Crimes and Criminal Acts Committed By Extremist Groups*, with the modifications proposed below.

ADL (the Anti-Defamation League)

For over one hundred years, the mission of ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) has been to “stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” Dedicated to combating antisemitism, prejudice, and bigotry of all kinds, ADL has unique expertise in preventing and combatting hatred, bigotry, and extremism of all forms. And, as one of the nation’s top non-governmental law enforcement training organizations, ADL also works directly with police at the federal, state, and local levels, providing resources and expertise to address the growing threats of hate crimes and white supremacist violence, while prioritizing an utmost commitment to civil rights.

Currently, 46 states, as well as the District of Columbia, have enacted hate crimes laws, many of which are based on, or similar to, ADL’s model statute. We were also privileged to lead a broad coalition of civil rights, religious, educational, professional, law enforcement, and civic organizations working in support of the 2009 Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act (“HCPA”) for more than a decade.

In addition, ADL has its own in-house research and investigative agency, known as the Center on Extremism, which is a clearinghouse of valuable information about extremism of all types. Our work also includes a dedicated team combating cyberhate and online harassment, reporting on trends, sharing intelligence with law enforcement, and helping individuals targeted online based on their protected characteristics.

Impact of Hate Crimes

All Connecticut residents have a stake in effective responses to crimes motivated by bigotry. These crimes demand priority attention because of their unique community-wide impact. When a person is targeted for a crime because of their race, color, religion, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or disability, it not only harms that person – it also harms the entire group of people who share that characteristic, leaving them feeling fearful, isolated, and vulnerable. Failure to properly address these incidents can cause a single event to explode into widespread community tension. The damage done by hate crimes, therefore, cannot be measured solely in terms of physical injury or dollars and cents.

Unfortunately, we know that hate crimes are on the rise across the country. According to the most recent FBI data available, for example, total hate crime incidents rose to 7,314 in 2019, marking the fourth increase in the past five years. 2019 was also the deadliest year on record with 51 hate crime murders – a 113% increase over the previous record set in 2018.

Growing Extremist Threat

As ADL has said time and time again, extremists must be taken at their word. This cycle of escalating hate did not begin in Charlottesville in 2017 or in our nation’s capital this past January 6th. Hateful, inciteful rhetoric online bleeds into explicit calls to violence, and earlier this year, people acted on those calls in the sacred halls of the U.S. Capitol.

With respect to the severity of the problem itself, there is no question that hate and extremism are on the rise. ADL research and FBI data show that over the last five years, violent extremism and white nationalist activity have surged online and on the ground. Here in Connecticut, data reflected in our [H.E.A.T. Map](#) confirm that there is cause for concern. Maintaining our safety and security will require vigilance and commitment from us all.

ADL’s Position re: SB 122

Law enforcement agencies play a critical role and carry significant responsibility when it comes to identifying and responding to hate crimes and extremist violence. We would like to thank State Senator Anwar and Commissioner Rovella and his team at the Connecticut State Police for their foresight and proactive effort to ensure we properly resource to the present, credible danger. Establishing a unit within the Connecticut State Police that is designated to investigating hate crimes will help centralize resources and expertise to ensure that data and best practices are shared statewide – and that Connecticut law enforcement is prepared to address these growing threats.

While ADL is generally supportive of Senate Bill 122, we would like the opportunity to discuss some of our reservations regarding the language in the proposed bill that authorizes this new Unit to also investigate “any other crimes that may be motivated by bigotry or bias” or “any criminal activity by extremist groups.” ADL would suggest instead that this Unit focus solely on hate crimes and investigating extremist criminal activity motivated in whole or in part by actual or perceived personal, protected characteristics – like, race, religion, sexual orientation, etc. – i.e., those characteristics already protected under Connecticut law.

We urge the Public Safety and Security Committee to report out SB 122 favorably and look forward to working with the Committee on the modifications contemplated in our testimony as the bill moves forward through the legislative process. Thank you.