

Washington, D.C. – Today, Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) voted to protect Americans by expanding the definition of hate crimes and providing law enforcement officers with the tools they need to prosecute these heinous crimes.

“Today I am proud to support the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act which will help prevent violence and ensure that justice is served,” Rep. Blumenauer said. “The special attention that hate crimes require can easily stretch local law enforcement beyond their capacity. Many of these crimes go unreported, allowing the perpetrators to escape punishment. This is unacceptable.”

“The Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act provides the necessary resources to state and local governments for the investigation and prosecution of these crimes. This kind of commitment to justice is the only way to prevent such random acts of violence from occurring in the first place.”

Under current law, the federal government can only investigate hate crimes motivated by the victim’s race, color, religion or national origin. The Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act extends federal jurisdiction to hate crimes motivated by the victim’s actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender, gender identity or disability, and provides assistance to state and local law enforcement to streamline the investigation and prosecution of hate crimes.

A similar bill passed the House with 237 votes in the last Congress, but was held up by the threat of a veto from former President Bush. Now, with President Barack Obama in the White House, law enforcement officers will have the tools to combat hate crimes and the victims of these crimes will finally have an opportunity for justice. The current bipartisan legislation is supported by a broad coalition, including more than 300 law enforcement, religious, women’s advocacy, civil rights and disability rights organizations.

This legislation was prompted in part by the brutal 1998 murder of a gay teenager named Matthew Shepard near Laramie, Wyoming. Since then, Shepard’s mother and supporters have lobbied Congress to expand the 1968 federal hate crimes law in honor of her son.

“In my home state of Oregon, four hate crimes have been reported this year and in 2008,

twenty-nine hate crimes were reported,” Blumenauer said. “Just last month, a man and his boyfriend were on a spring-break trip over the weekend when they were beaten unconscious on a beach in Seaside, Oregon. Last November, a 20-year-old woman was walking along a street in Aloha, Oregon, when the man asked for a cigarette. He asked if she was gay and when she said yes, he then started berating her about her sexual orientation. Eventually he pushed her and she fell to the ground. She tried to defend herself, but he knocked her back down and struck her in the head with a rock.”

“These violent crimes effectively terrorize the entire community and chip away at our freedoms. We must protect all our citizens – whether they are black, disabled, Christian, or gay.”

For Immediate Release

April 29, 2009

Media Contact: Sahar Wali

202-225-4813 Office/202-834-6919 Cell

Sahar.wali@mail.house.gov