



Testimony in support of
H.1819 /S.1051 An Act to Reform the Hate Crimes Statutes
Submitted to the Joint Committee on the Judiciary
By Jennifer Muroff, LWVMA Legislative Specialist
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We commend the legislature for passage of An Act Relative to Genocide Education and applaud the House for adopting Representative Nguyen's *House Resolution Supporting Asian and Asian-American Communities in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* to denounce Anti-Asian bigotry and violence in April. These valuable steps demonstrate your commitment to stopping hate in all forms across the Commonwealth.

But we must use all the tools in our toolbox to stop hate and hate incidents--including reforming the hate crimes statues. Improving the Massachusetts hate crime statutes will allow individuals to be held accountable and prosecuted for committing hate crimes. This bill clarifies definitions of the Massachusetts general laws to allow law enforcement officials to categorize crimes as official hate crimes and administer more severe penalties. Rep. Tram Nguyen, House lead sponsor, notes that hate crimes that target an individual based upon a protected class not only target an individual, but an entire community. Targeted harassment is not protected free speech under the First Amendment.

Hate crimes have increased dramatically in Massachusetts. According to the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS) report, Hate Crime in Massachusetts 2019, issued in November 2020, 421 hate crime offenses were reported. Prejudice against race/ethnicity or national origin was the most widely reported bias motivation representing 51.3% of the total. The FBI Hate Crime statistics for Massachusetts included 323 incidents in 2020, with 188 of these motivated by race, ethnicity or ancestry.

Nationally, anti-Asian hate crimes increased by nearly 150% in 2020, in an analysis released by the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University at San Bernardino. Stop AAPI Hate tracks and responds to incidents of hate, violence, harassment, and discrimination against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States. The organization reported 9,081 anti-Asian Racist incidents from March 19, 2020 through June 30, 2021—with 63% against women. In 2020, the FBI reported 7,759 hate crime incidents, the most since 2008. And this doesn't reflect the complete picture. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reports that nationwide, from 2010-2019, approximately 42% of violent hate crimes were not reported to police.

The League of Women Voters believes that all people deserve equal protection under the law, including protection from violations of their basic safety, individual liberties and rights. Following the mass shooting in Atlanta in March 2021, LWVUS issued the following statement: "We cannot fight the racism, hate, and impunity that threaten the lives of AAPIs unless our leadership takes the necessary actions to denounce racist violence and demand



accountability in its wake. The League stands in solidarity with AAPI communities. We are committed to listening to and amplifying AAPI voices and educating ourselves on the historic and ongoing systemic racism that plagues this country so that we can be better allies. We urge our followers to do the same, and to call on elected and appointed officials at all levels of government to demonstrate their commitment to keeping all communities safe. There can be no liberty in the face of racist and xenophobic violence.”

The LWVMA, representing 47 local Leagues from Cape Cod to the Berkshires, supports this bill and asks that you favorably report this bill out of committee.

Thank you for your consideration.