

HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE'S SPECIAL TASK FORCE ON HATE CRIMES,  
TERRORISM AND ARSON

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HARRISBURG, PA

ROLE OF THE STATE POLICE OFFICE OF HERITAGE AFFAIRS

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THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE HAS RECOGNIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF ADDRESSING HATE CRIMES IN A PRO ACTIVE MANNER, AS WELL AS THROUGH INVESTIGATION AND PROSECUTION. WHILE WE BELIEVE WE ARE SECOND TO NONE IN OUR ABILITY TO GATHER INTELLIGENCE INFORMATION AND PROSECUTE VIOLATIONS OF THE LAW, IT REMAINS IMPORTANT FOR THE STATE POLICE TO WORK TO PREVENT HATE CRIMES AND THE UNLAWFUL REACTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY WHO ARE TARGETS OF THESE INCIDENTS OF H ATE.

PENNSYLVANIA IS EXPERIENCING AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF HATE INCIDENTS REPORTED BY POLICE AGENCIES THROUGHOUT THE STATE. IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THIS INCREASE IN REPORTED INCIDENTS MAY REFLECT AN INCREASE IN THE ACTUAL NUMBER OF HATE INCIDENTS TAKING PLACE, BUT IT ALSO REFLECTS AN INCREASE IN REPORTING AS OFFICERS BROADEN THEIR AWARENESS OF WHAT CONSTITUTES A HATE INCIDENT.

OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS, TRAINING IN ETHNIC INTIMIDATION AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY AWARENESS HAS PROVIDED POLICE OFFICERS WITH THE ABILITY TO RECOGNIZE AND REPORT AN INCIDENT AS A HATE INCIDENT, WHERE IN THE PAST AN INCIDENT MAY HAVE BEEN REPORTED AS A CRIMINAL MISCHIEF OR SOME OTHER CRIME. FURTHER INVESTIGATION AND BETTER TRAINING MAY NOW RESULT IN A PROSECUTION FOR INSTITUTIONAL VANDALISM, A HATE CRIME AND NOT CRIMINAL MISCHIEF.

IRONICALLY, THIS POLICE OFFICER'S TRAINING AND DILIGENT REPORTING THROUGH THE UNIFORM CRIME REPORTING SYSTEM, MAY PRESENT AN UNFAIR IMAGE OF THE COMMONWEALTH WHEN COMPARED TO OTHER STATES. WHATCHDOG ORGANIZATIONS, SUCH AS THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER AND KLANWATCH HAVE PENNSYLVANIA RANKED AMONG THE TOP STATES IN THE NUMBER OF REPORTED HATE INCIDENTS AND THE NUMBER OR ORGANIZED HATE GROUPS. WHILE PENNSYLVANIA'S HATE CRIME PROBLEMS ARE NOT UNIQUE, I BELIEVE WE ARE UNIQUE AND MORE DILIGENT IN OUR ADVANCED INVESTIGATION, EDUCATION AND REPORTING OF THE INCIDENTS. NONETHELESS, THE FACT REMAINS THAT ANY AND ALL HATE CRIMES ARE SERIOUS MATTERS AND WE MUST CONTINUE TO TAKE APPROPRIATE ACTION TO PREVENT, INVESTIGATE AND PUNISH SUCH ILLEGAL ACTIVITY.

PENNSYLVANIA IS RAPIDLY BECOMING A MORE CULTURALLY DIVERSE STATE, PARTICULARLY IN OUR RURAL AREAS. THE INTERSTATE HIGHWAY SYSTEM, CONSTRUCTION OF STATE AND FEDERAL PRISONS AND BUSINESS EXPANSION IN THE RURAL AREAS HAS EXPEDITED THIS PROCESS. WHEN THE POPULATION MAKEUP CHANGES, WE SEE AN INCREASE IN THE INCIDENTS OF INTOLERANCE BY SOME PEOPLE. GROUPS SUCH AS THE INTERNATIONAL KEYSTONE KNIGHTS OF THE KU KLUX KLAN HAVE FOCUSED THEIR ACTIVITY IN MOSTLY RURAL AREAS SUCH AS PUNXSUTAWNEY, BROOKVILLE AND BEDFORD. ALTHOUGH THE NUMBER OF KLAN MEMBERS MAY BE SMALL, THE ACTIONS OF A FEW HATEFUL INDIVIDUALS

CAN OFTEN HAVE A DRAMATIC IMPACT ON THE NUMBER OF REPORTED HATE INCIDENTS AND THE SERENITY OF THE AREA. HISTORICALLY, PEACEFUL CITIZENS HAVE CHOSEN CONFRONTATION AS A MEANS OF VOCALIZING THEIR OPPOSITION TO SUCH HATE GROUPS AND THE PAST HAS SHOWN US THAT THIS HAS BEEN EXACTLY WHAT THE HATE GROUPS HAVE USED TO SEEK PUBLICITY AND FURTHER THEIR OWN AGENDA. THIS IS WHERE IT BECOMES INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT FOR THE STATE AND LOCAL POLICE TO TAKE A PRO ACTIVE APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM TO REDUCE TENSION AND THE POSSIBILITY THAT OTHERWISE PEACEFUL AND LAW ABIDING CITIZENS ARE INCITED TO TAKE THE LAW INTO THEIR OWN HANDS.

THE FOCUS OF THE OFFICE OF HERITAGE AFFAIRS IS NOT ON THE INVESTIGATION ASPECT OF HATE INCIDENTS, BUT RATHER ON PREVENTION AND PROPER RESPONSE TO THESE INCIDENTS BY CITIZENS. THE OFFICE OF HERITAGE AFFAIRS MAY INTERCEDE DURING OR IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING A HATE INCIDENT. IDEALLY HOWEVER, EDUCATION AND ORGANIZATION IN A COMMUNITY SHOULD TAKE PLACE BEFORE AN INCIDENT OF HATE TAKES PLACE. THE HERITAGE AFFAIRS OFFICE HAS WORKED IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES DIVISION OF THE PENNSYLVANIA HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION TO PROVIDE TRAINING TO ASSIST COMMUNITIES, INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION, BASIC EDUCATION AND PUBLIC AND PRIVATE WORKSHOPS IN AN EFFORT TO MINIMIZE THE DESTRUCTION AND POLARIZING IMPACT OF HATE

GROUPS AND OTHER HATE ACTIVITY. A TRAINING SEMINAR ENTITLED "THE STATE OF HATE IN PENNSYLVANIA...AND THE GOOD NEWS," HAS BEEN DEVELOPED AND PRESENTED MORE THEN 200 TIMES OVER THE PAST FOUR YEARS. THE SEMINAR HAS BEEN WARMLY RECEIVED. ONE OF THE RESULTS OF THIS TRAINING IS THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY COALITIONS, MADE UP OF LOCAL CITIZENS, WHO KNOW HOW TO PROPERLY RESPOND IF THEIR COMMUNITY IS TARGETED FOR HATE ACTIVITY. THE STRENGTH OF THE PROGRAM IS THAT IT COMES FROM TWO DIVERGENT PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS WHO AGREE THAT THERE IS ONLY ONE PROPER RESPONSE TO HATE ACTIVITY. THE REACTION TO THIS TRAINING HAS BEEN OVERWHELMINGLY POSITIVE.

IN CONCLUSION, LAWS ARE IN PLACE WHICH EFFECTIVELY FACILITATE THE PROSECUTION OF HATE CRIME PERPETRATORS AND THE AWARD OF COMPENSATION TO THE VICTIMS. WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO ENFORCE AND IMPROVE THESE LAWS AS CONDITIONS DEMAND, BUT WE MUST ALSO FOCUS ON PREVENTING UNLAWFUL REACTIONS TO HATE ACTIVITY WHICH EXACERBATES THE PROBLEM. IT IS OFTEN THE RESPONSE TO THE HATE CRIME THAT FEEDS THE DESTRUCTIVE CYCLE OF HATE. WE WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO PREVENT CRIMINAL ACTIVITY BY PEOPLE WHO MAKE A PERSONAL CHOICE TO ENGAGE IN THAT ACTIVITY. WE CAN, HOWEVER, ENDEAVOR TO EDUCATE PEOPLE SO THEY DO NOT UNINTENTIONALLY ENGAGE IN CRIMINAL ACTIVITY AS A RESPONSE TO THE INITIAL INCIDENT. THIS IS WHERE WE CAN DO THE MOST GOOD BECAUSE WE WILL

HAVE PREPARED AN AUDIENCE WHO WILL THEN MAKE THE CORRECT CHOICE WHEN PRESENTED WITH HATEFUL ACTIVITY. THIS PRO ACTIVE APPROACH IS COMMUNITY ORIENTED AND IT WILL GO A LONG WAY TO INSURE THAT ONLY THOSE WHO INITIATE HATE ACTIVITY WILL COMMIT CRIMES WHICH WILL REQUIRE PROSECUTION.