



UNITED JEWISH FEDERATION OF UTAH
 THE STRENGTH OF A PEOPLE – THE POWER OF COMMUNITY

February 19, 2019

Dear Governor Herbert, Speaker Wilson, President Adams, Senator Hemmert, Senator Thatcher, and members of the Senate Judiciary, Law Enforcement, and Criminal Justice Committee and Utah Senators:

All of us on the Board of the United Jewish Federation of Utah were moved and comforted by the outpouring of support from Utahns of all religions, their religious leaders and the elected leaders of our city, county, and state in the wake of the hateful and tragic shooting of eleven Jews in a Pittsburgh synagogue because they were Jewish. If a similar tragedy were to occur here, our county and state prosecutors would not be able to ensure an enhanced and fitting sentence for a crime motivated by hatred of a whole class of persons if the perpetrator was charged, tried, and convicted. Not long after the tragedy in Pittsburgh, we all became aware of a brutal attack on a young Mexican man in Salt Lake City, targeted because of his actual or perceived national origin.

Because we support SB 103, which enhances the sentences of individuals convicted of a hate crime, our Anti-Semitism Task Force Chair has spoken to the Interfaith Roundtable and the Coalition of Religious Communities, both composed of faith leaders and congregants of virtually all religious denominations. All of their sacred scriptures abhor acts of hatred. All with whom he spoke supported measures that would more severely punish the convicted perpetrators of hate crimes and that would deter or prevent them. They welcomed the idea that Utah, along with over 40 other states, both Republican and Democratic, that have these laws, could presently signal that our state is no place for hate. Not surprisingly, the Mexican Consul, with whom he met, also voiced support for the pending legislation and for an anti-hatred school education and training program developed by the Anti-Defamation League, whose model Hate Crimes Statute is reflected in most of the state laws about hate crimes. We are gratified and encouraged that the bill has received support from the Governor, the Chamber of Commerce, and the support or non-opposition of nearly all the faith communities in Utah, and the members of all the other groups enumerated in the bill. Sixty-four per cent of Utahns, and the majority of each major faith support SB103. Similar bills have been found to be constitutional and enforceable. We don't believe our elected leaders intend to signal that hate crimes are tolerated and not severely punished in Utah. That seems so unlikely in a territory and state founded to escape religious persecution. Because we have shared religious persecution and value the freedom and security to worship as we choose, we hope you will support SB 103. That would dispel any misunderstanding and affirm that Utah is absolutely no place for hate. We will feel proud and more secure to live in a state that signals it has no tolerance for crimes motivated by hatred and bigotry and punishes those who commit them with the severity they deserve.

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Dear Governor Herbert, Speaker Wilson, President Adams, Senator Hemmert, Senator Thatcher, and members of the Senate Judiciary, Law Enforcement, and Criminal Justice Committee and Utah Senators:

As Faith Leaders in Utah we are very pleased and proud that our leaders are giving strong and careful consideration to a law, SB0103, that will enable us to do as forty four other states do and punish a convicted criminal more severely if the victim is targeted because he or she belongs to a group historically associated with prejudice, violence and vulnerability. We and our congregants manifest many and perhaps all of the characteristics specifically enumerated in the bill: religion, race, ancestry, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin and disability. When anyone is threatened or attacked simply because of one of these characteristics, those of us who share it are devastated, afraid, worried, and anxious about what will happen to our peers, friends, relatives, and ourselves. In particular, when people and groups are targeted because of religion, we and those who share their faith may be reluctant to wear religious attire or symbols, acknowledge our faith, or be fearful when attending religious worship. Virtually all religions' sacred texts and commentary single out hatred as one of the most serious sins. The bill does not make hatred a crime and does not affect the right of free speech, but it does regard hatred as an aggravating factor that could and should be weighed in a convicted criminal's sentence. Just as we punish serial and mass killers and serial rapists more severely, we should acknowledge that someone who attacks someone solely because of an unalterable characteristic or freely chosen religion threatens and harms everyone who belongs to their group. Sixty-four per cent of Utahns, and the majority of each major faith support SB0103. We lead many different faith communities and we strongly support it. We hope you will support it. We will feel proud and more secure to live in a state that signals it has no tolerance for crimes motivated by hatred and bigotry and punishes those who commit them with the severity they deserve.

Sincerely,

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