

Connecticut Democrats Propose New State Police Department to Combat Alleged Hate Crimes



Democrats in the Connecticut Senate want a new state police department that will specialize in combating “far-right” extremists, which is how they categorized conservatives. Republican Senate Minority Leader Len Fasano says: “when they put a right-wing label on extremism, they do that to elicit a political response.” Senate President Pro Tem Martin Looney says his caucus has no intention of persecuting people for their political beliefs. [Of course not. Politicians wouldn’t dream of doing that, would they?] – GEG

Senate Democrats want to create and fund a new department within the state police focused on combating hate crimes and violent right-wing extremism.

Senate President Pro Tem Martin Looney, D-New Haven, said his caucus has no intention of persecuting people for their political beliefs, but they are increasingly concerned about contemplated, hateful actions.

“Unfortunately, people who entertain hateful beliefs ... are protected as long as [those beliefs] don’t result in hate-crime actions. That’s what we’re talking about,” he said Wednesday at a news conference at the Legislative Office Building. “We want to be more aggressive in enforcing our laws and identifying likely sources of potential domestic terrorism acts against religious institutions and ethnic institutions.”

The proposal was included as part of Senate Democrats' "A Just Connecticut" agenda. The new department would "specialize in investigating far right extremist groups and individuals," according to a news release.

In 2017, state police reported 111 "bias crime" incidents across Connecticut, up slightly from 2016. About 60% of the crimes were motivated by bias against a particular race, ethnicity or ancestry, while about 20% were motivated by religious bias. The statistics matched national trends. Most of the racially biased crimes were anti-black, while most of the religiously bias crimes were anti-Jewish. Intimidation and vandalism were the most common forms of these crimes, officials said.

Senate Minority Leader Len Fasano, R-North Haven, said there is "strong bipartisan support against any type of terrorism" but he took objection with the language Democrats used in announcing their proposal Wednesday.

"When they put a right-wing label on extremism, they do that to elicit a political response," he said, calling the label undefined and inappropriate. Still, he said Republicans are "on the same page" as Democrats when it comes to protecting Connecticut residents against hate crimes.

Bipartisan legislation passed in 2017 made several changes to the state's hate crime laws, "including modifying the elements of some of these crimes, broadening the protected classes, and enhancing certain penalties," according to a state police report.

"Protecting the state from hate crimes is one of our greatest concerns," Brian Foley, executive aide to the commissioner of the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, said Wednesday. The department oversees the state police.

"We work closely with many groups, faith-based as well as community groups, to ensure their safety and keep an open line

of communication,” Foley said. While state police “vigorously monitor, investigate and track” this issue, Foley added that police are always looking for ways to improve their service.

Besides committing acts of violence, it is also a crime to deprive someone of any legally guaranteed right, intentionally desecrate religious property or use burning crosses or nooses to intimidate others.

Looney said he recently attended a conference with representatives of Connecticut’s Jewish federations in New Haven, where religious leaders shared “grave concerns” about the security of places of worship. As part of the effort to combat hate crimes, the legislation would also call for funding to enhance security features at religious facilities across the state.

Laura Zimmerman, senior vice president and chief operating officer of the Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford, described the meeting in New Haven as a show of bipartisan support against hate crimes.

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