

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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