

HCS HB 57 -- PENALTY ENHANCEMENTS FOR CERTAIN OFFENSES

SPONSOR: Haefner

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Crime Prevention and Public Safety by a vote of 9 to 2. Voted "Do Pass" by the Committee on Rules- Legislative Oversight by a vote of 10 to 2.

This bill adds special victims to and increases the penalties for certain offenses when those offenses are committed against a special victim, as defined in Section 565.002, RSMo.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that law enforcement officers and first responders should qualify as a protected group that merits being added to the hate crime statutes. The attacks on law enforcement officers and first responders have increased significantly over the last couple of years, which makes the conversation about adding these groups to the statutes necessary. While law enforcement officers and first responders are able to remove their uniforms at the end of the day, unlike certain other characteristics of other groups protected by the hate crime statute, these officers and first responders can still be targets of hate crimes because of their employment status. It is time to put the public on notice that our public servants cannot be targeted. Last year there were 164 "line of duty" deaths, and many of those were ambush attacks, committed by individuals who had made up their minds that they were going to attack law enforcement officers.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Haefner; Missouri State Troopers Association; Kevin Ahlbrand, Missouri Fraternal Order of Police; Missouri Police Chiefs Association; Missouri State Council of Fire Fighters; Missouri Department of Public Safety; and Doyle Troy.

OPPOSERS: Those who oppose the bill say that law enforcement officers and first responders should not be added to this statute because it is meant to apply to individuals with immutable traits. There might be a better place to add law enforcement officers and first responders than to the hate crime statutes, where it serves as more of a distraction and a slippery slope to add individuals based on their employment status. Instead of adding these individuals to the hate crime statutes because of their employment status, there should be a conversation between prosecutors and law enforcement on how to better enforce the statutes relating to hate crimes. Most prosecutors are unwilling to take on hate crime cases.

Testifying against the bill were Karen Aroesty, Anti Defamation

League, Missouri/Southern Illinois; Rachel Girdler, Empower Missouri; and American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).