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State Attorney's Office for the Ninth Judicial Circuit Announces New Hate Crimes Task Force with \$1 Million Grant to Combat Hate Crimes

ORANGE COUNTY, Fla. – The State Attorney's Office for the Ninth Judicial Circuit is proud to announce the establishment of a new Hate Crimes Task Force through a \$1 million grant from the BJA Fiscal Year 2024 Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Program under the Justice Department's Office of Justice Programs, which will support the essential work we do.

The grant will support the Hate Crimes Task Force, which will focus on increasing public awareness, improving reporting mechanisms, enhancing investigations and increasing prosecution of hate crimes.

The task force aims to address the persistent issue of underreported hate crimes in Florida. Despite ongoing efforts, state data from 2022* revealed only 58 out of 254 law enforcement agencies in Florida reported hate crimes, highlighting a significant gap in hate crime data collection, reporting and victim support.

Hate Crimes Task Force Goals:

1. **Reduce Hate Crime Incidents:** Collaborate with stakeholders to mitigate hate crime incidents, particularly those based on race/ethnicity and religion.
2. **Increase Public Awareness and Reporting:** In partnership with the Stono Institute for Freedom, Justice, and Security, the task force will engage in community outreach to educate the public about hate crimes and how to report them.
3. **Facilitate Investigations:** The task force will work closely with local law enforcement to strengthen the identification, investigation and prosecution of hate crimes.
4. **Secure Justice for Victims:** Prosecutors will be trained to identify and effectively prosecute hate crimes, ensuring justice for those impacted by bias-motivated offenses.

Key Initiatives:

- **Online Hate Crime Reporting System:** Establish an online portal and telephone reporting system with the Stono Institute for Freedom, Justice, and Security to collect, vet and refer hate crime reports to appropriate law enforcement agencies.
- **Mediation for Non-Violent Hate Crimes:** Facilitate community mediation between victims and offenders in appropriate non-violent hate crime cases to prevent escalation and future violence.

- **Law Enforcement Training:** Law enforcement agencies will receive comprehensive training on hate crime laws and reporting requirements.
- **Prosecutor Training:** Prosecutors will receive specialized training on identifying hate crimes and overcoming challenges associated with prosecuting bias-motivated offenses.
- **Community Outreach and Victim Support:** The task force will host events to inform the public about their rights regarding hate crime laws and avenues for reporting hate crimes. Trauma-informed mental health services will also be available for hate crime victims.

Purpose and Impact: The task force aims to prevent hate incidents and crimes by educating the public and holding perpetrators accountable. It seeks to offer critical support to victims while enhancing public safety and promoting tolerance across communities. The State Attorney’s Office will ensure law enforcement plays a vital role in deterring hate crimes and supporting targeted persons and groups.

State Attorney Andrew Bain emphasized the importance of these efforts, saying:

“Hate crimes are not just attacks on individuals, they are attacks on the very fabric of our community. With this grant, we are strengthening our ability to fight hate crimes, support victims and build a more just and safe society. Establishing this task force has been a priority for us due to recent hate crime incidents I have seen both nationwide and in our own community. There is no place for hate crimes in our society and we want people to feel safe reporting these crimes, knowing their allegations will be taken seriously. We commend the law enforcement agencies in our community that already report hate crimes and look forward to working with all agencies to thoroughly investigate and prosecute the offenders behind these acts.”

This work is funded by the Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance.

More information about this award and other OJP awards can be found on the [OJP Grant Awards site](#).

Media interested in an interview regarding this topic may email pio@sao9.org.

*Source: Florida Office of the Attorney General “Hate Crimes in Florida 2022” report

About the Office of Justice Programs

The Office of Justice Programs provides federal leadership, grants, training, technical assistance, and other resources to improve the nation's capacity to prevent and reduce crime; advance equity and fairness in the administration of justice; assist victims; and uphold the rule of law. More information about OJP and its program offices – the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Institute of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office for Victims of Crime, and SMART Office – can be found at www.ojp.gov

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