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TESTIMONY: H. 3620 AND S. 14 BEFORE A SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE  
April 21, 2021

The League of Women Voters of South Carolina encourages you to pass a forceful and clear statutory basis for addressing hate crimes in South Carolina. We are one of the few states in which there is no law providing enhanced penalties for those who commit criminal acts in which the victim is selected based on beliefs or perceptions about the race or other attributes of the victim. The bills before this subcommittee provide a means of correcting that very unfortunate omission.

The League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS) has taken a strong position against hate crimes. For example, the LWVUS joined with more than a hundred other national organizations that are members of *The Leadership Conference of Civil and Human Rights* to appeal to the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate the killing of Ahmaud Arbery and proceed under federal hate crime laws.<sup>1</sup> However, no one should have to go to the federal government to achieve justice when South Carolinians are the victims of hate crimes. South Carolina can and should provide justice for its citizens.

There are strengths and weaknesses in both of the bills before this subcommittee today. We support the inclusion of a wide range of felonies and misdemeanors, including those against property, in S. 14. However, we cannot support that bill in full. Section 3 on juvenile offenders does not seem appropriate to us. Before attempting to define a legal response to hateful acts by juveniles, extensive study and input from specialists in child development and psychology are needed.

We therefore encourage this subcommittee to work for an amended bill that is inclusive in its definition of protected classes and the kinds of offenses covered. We believe that you should leave for later consideration the question of how juvenile offenders can best be treated to ensure that young people do not continue on a path of hate-fueled crimes.

Passage of a hate crimes bill will be a much-needed step forward for South Carolina .

Thank you for your attention.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.lwv.org/lwv-urges-department-justice-investigate-killing-ahmaud-arbery>