



# OLBCF: BLACK PAPERS

## A Public Policy Brief

**Theme:** Civil Laws and Enforcement

**Bill/Policy:** “Enact the Hate Crime Act” HB 306

**Status:** Referred to the Judiciary Committee

**Date:** February 2026 | **Lead:** Yassah Tommy

## THE QUICK CLIP

“Enact the Hate Crime Act” (HB 306) bans hate crimes motivated by factors such as political affiliation, race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, military status, or disability. It allows victims to file civil lawsuits, which could lead to fines of up to \$25,000. The purpose of this act is to update Ohio’s approach to handling hate crimes and to protect its residents.

## THE STATE HOUSE BREAKDOWN

- **Current Status:** [Referred to the Judiciary Committee on 5/28/25](#)
- **Before HB 306:** Ohio’s hate-crime-related framework was narrower. The closest existing provision was ‘ethnic intimidation,’ which enhanced consequences for certain underlying offenses when motivated by a person’s or group’s race, religion, or national origin.<sup>1</sup>
- **After HB 306:** HB 306 expands the protected categories by providing protection based on a person’s or group’s race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, age, familial status, military status, or disability. The bill creates the option for victims to pursue civil remedies against offenders, who could face fines of up to \$25,000. Additionally, it imposes a criminal penalty for crimes committed against individuals based on their personal attributes.<sup>2</sup>
- **The "Why":** OLBCF played a leading advocacy role in elevating the urgency of this issue by bringing forward the experience of a Black woman in her 60s from the City of Delaware (Delaware County) who reported being targeted with a racial slur and intimidation in a public setting and then experienced ongoing fear even after reporting the incident. In reviewing Ohio’s current framework, we found no clear, comprehensive law to protect victims in situations like this and to create consistent accountability. OLBCF brought this harm and this policy gap to Black legislators to support informed advocacy and public education. Sponsors Rep. Dontavius L. Jarrells (D) and Rep. Josh Williams (R) have said this bill responds to a rise in bias-motivated incidents and the need for Ohio’s laws to better protect residents targeted because of who they are.<sup>3</sup>

## THE IMPACT ON OHIOANS

*How this could affect our families, friends, and community.*

- **Economic & Social Stakes:** HB 306 offers legal protection against acts of perceived violence and harassment targeting Ohio citizens based on their identity. This bill aims to ensure more Ohioans feel safeguarded by the law if they experience a hate-motivated crime. It would prevent situations where individuals like the Black woman in her 60s, from the City of Delaware (Delaware County), are assaulted or harmed without meaningful consequences for the offender. Additionally, the bill seeks to raise community awareness of

these crimes, so people understand that such acts occur and that solutions exist to protect them, fostering greater hope in the criminal justice system.

- **The Disparity:** Between 2021 and 2026 in the United States, the FBI documented 59,513 hate crimes, with 32,785 driven by racial, ethnic, or ancestry bias.<sup>4</sup> Of these, 16,410 targeted Black or African American victims.<sup>5</sup> A significant portion of hate crimes are directed at Black communities. This legislation may help Black individuals feel safer from racially motivated crimes and strengthen their confidence in the justice system.
- **Real Life Implications:** If you're Christian and someone attacks you because of your faith—especially if they use slurs and clearly make it about your identity—that can be reported as a hate crime to local police or even the FBI. The person could face more severe criminal penalties because the crime was motivated by bias. In some cases, you might also be able to pursue legal action in civil court. The same applies if someone targets a disabled person because of their disability; that bias element can affect how the case is handled legally.

## ANALYSIS & REFLECTION

- **Important Concern:** HB 306 does not explicitly list sexual orientation or gender identity among its protected categories. The bill's sponsors, Rep. Dontavius L. Jarrells (D) and Rep. Josh Williams (R) have stated that sexual orientation is included under the term "sex," but that interpretation could be contested.<sup>6</sup> Without explicit language, enforcement and prosecution may be less predictable across jurisdictions for incidents involving sexual orientation or gender identity. This lack of clarity may leave some Ohioans uncertain about whether the law applies to them and may weaken public confidence in consistent protection under the law.
- **Free Speech Clarification:** This bill does not criminalize beliefs or protected speech. It focuses on conduct—criminal acts—and creates additional accountability when that conduct is motivated by bias against protected characteristics. The legal question is not whether someone holds an opinion; it is whether an offense occurred or whether biased motivation is established under the bill standards.

## DIRECT ACTION: THE PROACTIVE RESPONSE

*How to move from reacting to leading.*

- **Watch the Hearing:** Tune in to The Ohio Channel ([ohiochannel.org](http://ohiochannel.org)) and search for the bill number and committee to follow hearings live and in the archive.
- **Submit Testimony:** Written and in-person testimony puts community impact on the public record. OLBCF can help residents draft a clear 2–3-minute statement and submit it to the committee correctly.
- **Call for Movement:** Contact your State Representative and the committee for leadership to request a hearing and a vote.
- **Track the Bill:** Use the Ohio Legislature website to track HB 306 and receive updates on hearings, amendments, and votes

## References

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<sup>1</sup> Ohio General Assembly. *House Bill 306, As Introduced*. 136th General Assembly. Ohio Legislature. Available through the HB 306 documents page. <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb306/documents>

<sup>2</sup> Ohio General Assembly. *House Bill 306, As Introduced*.

<sup>3</sup> Jarrells, D. L. (2026, February 25). *HB 306 – Hate Crime Act Remarks* [Testimony presented to the House Judiciary Committee]. In *House Bill 306 Committee Activity*, 136th General Assembly. Ohio Legislature. Available at <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb306/committee>

Joshua E. Williams, written testimony on HB 306, Ohio House Judiciary Committee, 136th Gen. Assem. (2026), Ohio Legislature. Available at <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb306/committee>

<sup>4</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime Data Explorer: Hate Crime, Uniform Crime Reporting Program*, <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/explorer/crime/hate-crime>

<sup>5</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime Data Explorer*

<sup>6</sup> Ohio House of Representatives, “A bipartisan group of legislators just introduced an Ohio hate crimes bill. Does it protect LGBTQ+ Ohioans? It depends who you ask,” *In the News: Tristan Rader*, June 4, 2025, Ohio House of Representatives website, <https://ohiohouse.gov/members/tristan-rader/in-the-news/a-bipartisan-group-of-legislators-just-introduced-an-ohio-hate-crimes-bill-does-it-protect-lgbtq-ohioans-it-depends-who-you-ask-5768>