



STATEMENT OF NADIA AZIZ, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, STOP HATE PROJECT

LAWYERS' COMMITTEE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS UNDER LAW

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My name is Nadia Aziz and I am Associate Director of the Stop Hate Project with the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

The Lawyers' Committee is a national racial justice organization created at the request of President John F. Kennedy in 1963. President Kennedy sought to enlist the private bar's leadership and resources in combatting discrimination in courtrooms across America. Today, we have the largest pro bono network in the country and are on the front lines of the fight for racial justice.

Hate crimes are a national crisis. According to government data, approximately 200,000 individuals are victimized by a hate crime every year in America. That breaks down to over 20 an hour.

In Maryland alone, hate crimes have increased 27% from 2016 to 2018, and in 2018, over 50% of hate crime victims were Black.

Fueling this growth in hate crime is the fact that white supremacy has sought to rebrand itself and become more palatable to broader audiences. Instead of hiding behind hoods, white supremacists today hide behind computer screens. Instead of "white supremacy," they say "white nationalism" – but the message of racial superiority remains the same. The actions of online white supremacists are new in form but not substance. By directing hateful threats, intimidation, and harassment online at African Americans, and other historically marginalized communities, they follow the same script as generations of white supremacists that assaulted civil rights activists at lunch counters, defaced houses of worship, and berated children on their way to school.

In May of 2017, 2nd Lieutenant Richard W. Collins, III was violently murdered on the University of Maryland's campus. The murderer who took his life was part of the new online white supremacist communities that are encouraging violent hate – he was a member of a white-nationalist Facebook group, "Alt-Reich Nation," and he spent his free time up-voting racially violent memes online.<sup>i</sup> The murderer was charged with murder and hate crime. Despite this and other evidence that the murderer's actions were motivated by his racist beliefs, the court dismissed the hate crime charge at trial.

The current language in Maryland's Criminal Code 10-304 represents a common, yet fixable, barrier to justice for victims of hate crimes. The 2nd Lieutenant Richard Collins, III Law, seeks to correct the language of what qualifies a crime as being motivated by hate.

The current clause requires prosecutors to prove bias as the entire or sole motivation behind an individual's action. In Maryland and across the country, this type of language stands in the way of justice. In Texas, a state that shares the same general legal stipulation for hate crimes as Maryland, there were 981 hate crimes reported between 2010 and 2015. Of those, just eight defendants were convicted.<sup>ii</sup>



States that have passed similar bills that include the proposed amendment to 10-304 have seen far greater success in fighting hate crimes. In 2018, California referred 33% percent of reported hate crime offenses to prosecutors, who convicted 65% of hate crimes that reached dispositions.<sup>iii</sup>

That is why the Lawyers' Committee implores the Maryland legislature to pass the "2nd Lieutenant Richard Collins, III Law".

Lt. Collins came from a family with a proud history of serving their country in the armed services. His life was taken from him just days before his graduation from Bowie State, and days after he took his oath to serve in the U.S. Army.

Our country failed him. Our country failed his family.

I implore you to pass the amended Criminal Code 10-304 as a way to honor his memory, protect others, and lead by example in the fight for justice.

Thank you.

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<sup>i</sup> News article from <https://www.thedailybeast.com/accused-killer-of-black-soldier-liked-pro-trump-pro-white-memes>

<sup>ii</sup> News article <https://www.propublica.org/article/hate-crime-law-results-in-few-convictions-and-lots-of-disappointment>

<sup>iii</sup> *Hate Crime in California* <https://data-openjustice.doj.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2019-07/Hate%20Crime%20In%20CA%2020190701.pdf>