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SCHAKOWSKY HAILS HOUSE ACTION ON HATE CRIMES LEGISLATION

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today hailed action by the House of Representatives on hate crimes legislation. The House voted to instruct its negotiators to accept a Senate provision dealing with hate crimes when conferees meet to work out differences on the Defense Authorization bill. The provision would strengthen hate crime laws by expanding the definition to include sexual orientation, gender, and disability. It would also remove the overly burdensome requirement that victims of hate crimes be on federal property or engaged in "federally protected activities" at the time of their attacks.

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□ Below is Schakowsky's statement.

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"I hope my granddaughters Isabel and Eve never know of violence motivated by bigotry and hate. Today we have the opportunity to strengthen our hate crimes prevention law by expanding the definition of a "hate crime" to include sexual orientation, as well as gender and disability. These crimes tear at the fabric of our society and insidiously erode our principles of tolerance and diversity. Before this Congress adjourns for the year, we must send a loud message that the safety of all people is paramount and anyone who commits a crime based on bigotry and hate will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

"I don't want to be the one to explain to Ricky Brydsong's widow that he did not deserve protection because he was killed walking outside of his house rather than while he was engaged in a "federally protected activity." And I don't want to be the person who has to explain to the family of Matthew Shepard why this Congress was unable to pass tougher laws that punish people who commit crimes based on sexual orientation. The Brydsong and Shepard families are not alone. For every high profile, heinous hate crime that makes it to the forefront of our national consciousness, hundreds and thousands of nameless victims and families have been targeted simply because of their gender, sexual orientation and disability.

"Since 1991, 60,000 hate crimes have been reported to the FBI and in 1998 alone, there were close to 8,000 hate crimes reported, almost one every hour. Many argue that hate crimes cannot be separated from other crimes. This is just untrue. Hate crimes are violence targeted at individuals simply because of who they are. Perpetrators are motivated by hate and their actions are intended to strike fear into an entire group of people. We know that individuals are targeted because of their sexuality, disability, and gender, just as often as because of their race, religion, and national origin, and our hate crimes prevention legislation must be expanded to protect them too."

"What is the lesson we are teaching our children and what legacy will I leave my

granddaughters if we don't pass laws that protect all of our citizens? If we fail, we will be turning our backs on our citizens. Should we succeed, we will be sending a clear message to all that we will not tolerate bigotry and hate. We have a choice. Let us choose wisely."