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Spitzer Outraged Over Drastic Hate Crime Increase *Tough on Crime Must Include Prosecuting Hate Crime Cases*

(Orange County, CA) – Newly released statistics revealing a large increase in hate crime and hate incidents in Orange County shows lax prosecution methods have placed residents at risk.

The Orange County Human Relations Commission 2017 Hate Crimes Report details an appalling 56 cases of hate crime and 94 hate incidents in Orange County during 2017. The Commission, which released the annual report on Tuesday, says the number of hate crimes may be underreported by as much as 50 percent.

“Reported hate crime is up 27 percent since 2015,” Supervisor Spitzer said, “Yet, our County does not prosecute hate crimes at the same rate as Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and San Diego counties. This is a disservice to targets of hate crime and does not speak to the critical need to pursue justice for all victims.”

The Orange County District Attorney’s Office has filed charges in 57 percent of the hate crimes during the past 13 years while Los Angeles County files 70 percent of their cases. In San Diego and San Bernardino counties, prosecutors file 80 percent of the hate crime cases referred by law enforcement.

13 percent of the county’s hate crimes in 2017 targeted Muslims, and when combined with the incidents against people who appear to be Middle Eastern, the number of hate crimes against these groups accounts for 16 percent of the year’s total. This is more than double the number of cases in recent years and mirrors a national trend of increased hate crimes against Muslims and Middle Eastern individuals.

At the report release event, Dr. Peter Simi, Director of Earl Babbie Research Center and Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Chapman University, said established hate groups have become emboldened to latch onto increased national anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment to covertly push their message of hate to the mainstream, where its dark origin may be concealed.

40 percent of the hate crimes that occurred in 2017 in Orange County happened in a public place like a park or shopping center. But 23 percent of hate incidents happened in schools.

“The thought of hate brewing among our young people is especially disturbing,” Spitzer said. “Every hate crime committed by an adult that is not prosecuted shows to our young people that bigotry and hatred is tolerated.”

Brette Steele, Regional Director of Strategic Engagement Office of Terrorism Prevention Partnerships at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, said identifying warning signs in individuals can be critical to early-prevention of hate crime and hate incidents. Schools should take reports of hate speech seriously by reducing feelings of isolation, increasing a sense of belonging, and calling out hate incidents.

“Orange County’s low prosecution rate sends a message to the entire community that hate crimes are inconsequential. Orange County should be a leader in hate crime prosecutions, not the follower. The 2017 Hate Crime Report is a wakeup call that we need to be even more vigilant in protecting our citizens.”

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