

Bob Dole



NEWS

U. S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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DOLE EXPANDS DEFINITION OF HATE CRIMES TO INCLUDE DISABLED;  
OTHER PROVISIONS TACKLE VIOLENCE AND ABUSE AGAINST DISABLED

Washington -- Senate Republican Leader Bob Dole today released the following statement regarding the Crime bill passed today by the U.S. Senate which included for the first time provisions dealing with the special risks and fears faced by the people with disabilities:

I am happy to report that for the first time a major crime bill recognizes the high risks of violence and abuse faced by people with disabilities. I sponsored an amendment which expands the definition of hate crimes to include those against the disabled, and directs the Justice Department to collect statistics on hate crimes against the disabled, such as arson of group homes for people with mental retardation. Another amendment creates for the first time penalties for such crimes in federal law. I was also pleased to join with Senators Cohen and Hatch to allow criminal background checks on persons providing home care and personal assistance services. For many disabled persons, personal assistance is essential to independent living. That assistance should not be an invitation to exploitation.

But the Crime bill just passed by the Senate is critically important to people with disabilities in other important respects, especially those provisions related to abuse and sexual violence. We know too well that all Americans are vulnerable to crime, but people with disabilities are at special risk. For example, children with disabilities are almost twice as likely to be abused as other children, and disabled people are more than one and a half times likely to be victims of sexual violence.

We do not know the extent of other crimes against the disabled because no one collects that information -- but we should assume it is high. However, I do know that in a 1986 Louis Harris survey of disabled Americans, fear -- fear of being hurt, fear of being a crime victim -- was ranked as the number one reason why they did not engage in social activities as often as other Americans -- whether going to the movies or visiting with friends. Although the Congress has done much to remove architectural barriers, people with disabilities rank these barriers only fifth among the reasons why they don't go out more. Yet, until now, almost no one has paid attention to what people with disabilities say is their biggest barrier.

Three years ago we enacted the Americans With Disabilities Act, determined to pursue a national policy of full participation of people with disabilities in American society. But that policy will remain hollow if people with disabilities are afraid to leave their homes, or afraid of their personal assistants.

No doubt about it, this Crime bill makes an important start in overcoming the barriers of fear faced by people with disabilities -- if only because we can't begin to fix a problem until we recognize one exists. But this Crime bill is only a start. We need to know much more about the risks of violence and abuse faced by the disabled, and we need good ideas for other solutions, particularly at the state and local level.

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