Washington, D.C. – US Rep. Keith Ellison (D-Minneapolis) voted last week for the expansion of federal authority in the prosecution of violent crimes known as “hate crimes.” H.R. 1913, *The Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009*
also provides state and local governments with grant money to assist in the investigation and prosecution of hate crimes. Hate crimes are crimes that are motivated by race, color, gender, gender identity, religion, national origin or sexual orientation.

“Hate crimes are an especially insidious problem in this country,” Ellison stated. “They often are underreported or not reported at all – especially when they are based on sexual orientation. I welcome this long over-due Federal legislation,” Ellison said.

Legislation at the Federal level is necessary to prevent hate crimes because only eleven states and the District of Columbia have hate crime laws that cover sexual orientation and gender identity. Additionally, only thirty-one states have hate crime laws that include sexual orientation. Minnesota law triggers heightened penalties for hate crimes including sexual orientation and gender identity.
“Hate crimes are a particular threat to our communities because they are designed to intimidate and frighten citizens based on a person’s characteristics. This kind of domestic terrorism has no place in America. I fully support the right of all citizens to live without the fear of bias-driven violence,” said Ellison.

H.R. 1913 received widespread support from religious, advocacy and human rights groups including: B’nai B’rith International, African American Ministers in Action, NETWORK (a national Catholic social justice lobby), United Methodist Church, Islamic Society of North America, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, National Association of Social Workers, Easter Seals, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) American Psychological Association, National Organization for Women, National Congress of Black Women, National Council of Jewish Women, AFL-CIO Department of Civil, Human and Women’s Rights and the American Association of University Women.

Ellison is Vice-Chair of the Congressional Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, and Transgender (LBGT) Caucus.