

# Georgia lawmakers renew push for a hate crime bill after Ahmaud Arbery shooting

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(CNN) Georgia lawmakers are calling for changes to the state code to include hate crimes after the shooting death of Ahmaud Arbery, who was killed while jogging through a neighborhood.

Jasmine Arbery, Ahmaud's sister, told CNN she thought the shooting was a hate crime. Arbery was black and the men involved in the shooting incident are white.

This isn't the first time members of the Georgia Legislative Black Caucus (GLBC) have called for a hate crime bill. Back in November, a 16-year-old girl in Gainesville allegedly plotted to attack a historically black church faced a charge of criminal attempt to commit murder, but she didn't face any hate crime charges.

Georgia black caucus will push for hate crime law after teen allegedly planned to attack black churchgoers

Georgia is one of four states -- including Arkansas, South Carolina and Wyoming -- that don't have hate crime laws or require data collection on such crimes, according to the US Justice Department website. However, even if a state doesn't have hate crime laws, the Justice Department says such crimes can still be reported to the FBI.

"We do need a safe net in Georgia that shows we do not condone or support hate crimes," said state Rep. Karen L. Bennett, GLBC chair.

House Bill 426 looked to become that safe net. The bill, drafted during the 2019 session, looked to amend the Georgia state code so that anyone convicted of a hate crime would face stricter sentencing and penalties. Under this amended code, a person convicted of a misdemeanor hate crime would face at least three months, but no more than 12, in prison. A person convicted of a felony hate crime would face at least two years in prison. The bill passed through the Georgia House of Representatives, but stalled in the Senate, according to the state's legislative website.

Bennett told CNN Friday the GLBC is asking for a hearing in the Judicial Committee when the General Assembly reconvenes on June 11 and will urge their colleagues in the state Senate to pass this bill. Bennett said Arbery's death was the perfect reason to pass the bill.

Hate crimes remain at heightened levels, FBI report finds

"If this doesn't convince our Senators that we need a hate crime bill in Georgia, it takes my mind back to the days of lynching, the days of slavery and before our civil rights where people thought the murder of innocent people of color was OK," she said.

Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp issued a statement to CNN saying "Georgians want a swift and thorough investigation into the death of Ahmaud Arbery," that he knows the Georgia Bureau of Investigations will provide.

"We know conversations about legislation are already underway, and we will work through the process when the General Assembly reconvenes," Kemp's statement read.

Hate Crime Bill in Georgia

## Hate Crimes remain at high levels, FBI says

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The number of hate crimes committed in 2018 was actually just 55 fewer than in 2017, when the levels surged, according to the FBI's [Hate Crime Statistics](#) released in November.

The data showed that bias against African Americans overwhelmingly comprised the largest category of reported hate crime offenses pertaining to race, with a total of 46.9% of them motivated by anti-black or African American bias.

"I think no one wants to talk about the racism that still exists," Bennett told CNN in discussing the proposed hate crime bill. "When one hears hate crimes, there are certain populations that think they're crimes committed against black people. Hate crimes know no color, creed, sexual identity and that bill is to protect that class of people from those that seek to harm just for who and what they are and what they stand for."

CNN's Faith Karimi, Devan Cole and Josh Campbell contributed to this report.