

REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY GOVERNOR JIM FLORIO
ETHNIC INTIMIDATION BILL SIGNING
TRENTON, NEW JERSEY
THURSDAY, AUGUST 9, 1990

THIS MARKS THE SECOND TIME I HAVE COME HERE TO THE HILLEL CENTER. LAST DECEMBER, I SPOKE ABOUT THE AFTERMATH OF AN ANTI-SEMITIC ATTACK HERE.

I SPOKE ABOUT THE NEED FOR TOLERANCE. ABOUT THE NEED FOR ONE NEW JERSEY, NOT TWO. ABOUT HOW FRESH PAINT COULD REMOVE THE SWASTIKAS, BUT THAT THE HURT STILL LINGERED.

TODAY, I AM HERE TO SIGN WHAT I BELIEVE IS AN IMPORTANT PIECE OF LEGISLATION FOR THIS STATE. IT IS A LAW THAT STRIKES BACK AT ETHNIC INTIMIDATION AND CRIMES OF HATE.

I'M PROUD OF THIS LAW AND ITS SPONSORS. PEOPLE LIKE SENATOR FELDMAN, WHO HAS DEVOTED MANY YEARS OF HIS LIFE TO PROMOTING TOLERANCE.

I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT THE FOUNDATIONS HE SET IN TEANECK WENT A LONG WAY TOWARD EASING THE RECENT TENSIONS THERE. AND WE CANNOT FORGET THE VALUABLE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ASSEMBLYMEN SPADORO AND MENENDEZ.

THIS LEGISLATION DOES MORE THAN PUNISH. IT SAYS SOMETHING ABOUT WHO WE ARE, AND ABOUT THE IDEALS TO WHICH THIS STATE IS COMMITTED.

FOR MORE THAN 200 YEARS, THE PROMISE OF THIS STATE HAS BEEN STATED IN THAT SELF-EVIDENT TRUTH THAT ALL MEN AND WOMEN ARE CREATED EQUAL.

IT SOUNDS SO SIMPLE. BUT WE ALL KNOW THERE IS A TREMENDOUS DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE PROMISE AND THE PERFORMANCE -- BETWEEN THE IDEAL AND THE REALITY OF THE WORLD WE LIVE IN.

IN TOO MANY MISTAKEN MINDS, PEOPLE ARE NOT CREATED EQUAL. AND WHEN PEOPLE ACT ON THAT BELIEF, THE RESULTS ARE ALWAYS TRAGIC.

TAKEN TO THE EXTREME, WE ARE LEFT WITH THE HOLOCAUST. IN NEW JERSEY, IT'S MORE LIKELY TO BE A SINGLE ACT OF HATE AGAINST THOSE OF A DIFFERENT CULTURE, OR RELIGION, OR RACE.

WHEN YOU CONSIDER THAT WE ARE A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS, BOUND TOGETHER BY THE IDEALS OF FREEDOM AND EQUALITY, THESE CRIMES ARE ALL THE MORE DISTRESSING.

BECAUSE INCREASINGLY, NEW IMMIGRANTS ARE THE TARGET OF HATEFUL SLURS, VIOLENT ACTS, OR WORSE. THERE WAS NO EXCUSE FOR IT IN MY GRANDFATHER'S TIME, WHEN PREJUDICE AGAINST ITALIANS WAS OPEN AND BITTER. THERE IS NO EXCUSE FOR IT NOW.

YET THE CRIMES OF HATE ARE RISING IN NEW JERSEY. LAST YEAR, THERE WERE MORE THAN 600 CRIMES DIRECTLY TIED TO RACE, RELIGION AND ETHNIC ORIGIN.

MOST OF THOSE CRIMES WERE DIRECTED AT AFRICAN AMERICANS AND JEWS. BUT THE RISING TIDE OF INTOLERANCE INCLUDES KOREANS, VIETNAMESE, HISPANICS AND OTHERS.

I DIDN'T COME HERE TODAY TO COMPLAIN ABOUT THE WAY THINGS ARE. I'M HERE TO TAKE STEPS TOWARD CHANGE.

IT'S TIME TO TAKE STRONG ACTION AGAINST CRIMES OF HATE. IT'S TIME TO MAKE THE LAW SPEAK CLEARLY. IT'S TIME TO STIFFEN THE PENALTIES FOR THOSE CRIMES.

FROM NOW ON, THE LAW IN NEW JERSEY WILL BE INTOLERANT OF ETHNIC INTIMIDATION. THOSE WHO COMMIT THESE CRIMES OF HATE ARE GOING TO FACE ADDITIONAL CHARGES.

FROM NOW ON, HATE CRIMES WILL BE SERIOUS CRIMES -- WHETHER IT'S A PHONE CALL IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, OR VANDALISM THAT LEAVES HATEFUL SYMBOLS IN ITS WAKE, OR RACIAL SLURS.

FOR TOO LONG, WE CONDEMNED THESE CRIMES AS A SOCIETY, AND THEN IGNORED THEM IN OUR COURTS. TODAY, THE LAW WILL BEGIN TO SPEAK OUT AS WELL.

I WANT TO ADD, HOWEVER, THAT EVEN WITH A TOUGHER LAW, ALL OF US HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO SPEAK OUT WHEN WE SEE CRIMES OF HATE OR ETHNIC INTIMIDATION.

SILENCE AND INDIFFERENCE ARE FERTILE FIELDS FOR HATE, AND IF WE HAVE LEARNED ANYTHING OVER THE YEARS, IT'S THAT EVIL FLOURISHES WHEN GOOD PEOPLE DO NOTHING.

NOT ONLY MUST WE SPEAK OUT, WE MUST EDUCATE OUR CHILDREN. WE MUST TEACH THEM THAT DIVERSITY STRENGTHENS US, AND THAT HATE WILL ALWAYS WEAKEN US.

BIGOTRY IS WRONG. IT DESTROYS OUR SENSE OF COMMUNITY. IT WASTES OUR MOST PRECIOUS RESOURCE -- THE HUMAN POTENTIAL. AND WHEN WE WASTE THAT, WE ROB THIS STATE OF A BETTER FUTURE.

SO I'M PROUD TO TAKE A POSITIVE STEP TOWARD NEW JERSEY'S FUTURE AND SIGN THIS BILL INTO LAW.