

Public Law 104-155
104th Congress

An Act

July 3, 1996

[H.R. 3525]

To amend title 18, United States Code, to clarify the Federal jurisdiction over offenses relating to damage to religious property.

Church Arson
Prevention Act of
1996.

18 USC 241 note.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Church Arson Prevention Act of 1996”.

18 USC 247 note.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

The Congress finds the following:

(1) The incidence of arson or other destruction or vandalism of places of religious worship, and the incidence of violent interference with an individual’s lawful exercise or attempted exercise of the right of religious freedom at a place of religious worship pose a serious national problem.

(2) The incidence of arson of places of religious worship has recently increased, especially in the context of places of religious worship that serve predominantly African-American congregations.

(3) Changes in Federal law are necessary to deal properly with this problem.

(4) Although local jurisdictions have attempted to respond to the challenges posed by such acts of destruction or damage to religious property, the problem is sufficiently serious, widespread, and interstate in scope to warrant Federal intervention to assist State and local jurisdictions.

(5) Congress has authority, pursuant to the Commerce Clause of the Constitution, to make acts of destruction or damage to religious property a violation of Federal law.

(6) Congress has authority, pursuant to section 2 of the 13th amendment to the Constitution, to make actions of private citizens motivated by race, color, or ethnicity that interfere with the ability of citizens to hold or use religious property without fear of attack, violations of Federal criminal law.

SEC. 3. PROHIBITION OF VIOLENT INTERFERENCE WITH RELIGIOUS WORSHIP.

Section 247 of title 18, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in subsection (a), by striking “subsection (c) of this section” and inserting “subsection (d)”;

(2) by redesignating subsections (c), (d), and (e), as subsections (d), (e), and (f), respectively;

(3) by striking subsection (b) and inserting the following:

“(b) The circumstances referred to in subsection (a) are that the offense is in or affects interstate or foreign commerce.

“(c) Whoever intentionally defaces, damages, or destroys any religious real property because of the race, color, or ethnic characteristics of any individual associated with that religious property, or attempts to do so, shall be punished as provided in subsection (d).”;

(4) in subsection (d), as redesignated—

(A) in paragraph (2)—

(i) by inserting “to any person, including any public safety officer performing duties as a direct or proximate result of conduct prohibited by this section,” after “bodily injury”; and

(ii) by striking “ten years” and inserting “20 years”;

(B) by redesignating paragraphs (2) and (3) as paragraphs (3) and (4), respectively;

(C) by inserting after paragraph (1) the following:

“(2) if bodily injury results to any person, including any public safety officer performing duties as a direct or proximate result of conduct prohibited by this section, and the violation is by means of fire or an explosive, a fine under this title or imprisonment for not more than 40 years, or both;”;

(5) in subsection (f), as redesignated—

(A) by striking “religious property” and inserting “religious real property” both places it appears; and

(B) by inserting “, including fixtures or religious objects contained within a place of religious worship” before the period; and

(6) by adding at the end the following new subsection:

“(g) No person shall be prosecuted, tried, or punished for any noncapital offense under this section unless the indictment is found or the information is instituted not later than 7 years after the date on which the offense was committed.”.

SEC. 4. LOAN GUARANTEE RECOVERY FUND.

(a) IN GENERAL.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Using amounts described in paragraph (2), the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (referred to as the “Secretary”) shall make guaranteed loans to financial institutions in connection with loans made by such institutions to assist organizations described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 that have been damaged as a result of acts of arson or terrorism in accordance with such procedures as the Secretary shall establish by regulation.

Regulations.

(2) USE OF CREDIT SUBSIDY.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law, for the cost of loan guarantees under this section, the Secretary may use not more than \$5,000,000 of the amounts made available for fiscal year 1996 for the credit subsidy provided under the General Insurance Fund and the Special Risk Insurance Fund.

(b) TREATMENT OF COSTS.—The costs of guaranteed loans under this section, including the cost of modifying loans, shall be as defined in section 502 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974.

(c) LIMIT ON LOAN PRINCIPAL.—Funds made available under this section shall be available to subsidize total loan principal, any part of which is to be guaranteed, not to exceed \$10,000,000.

(d) TERMS AND CONDITIONS.—The Secretary shall—

(1) establish such terms and conditions as the Secretary considers to be appropriate to provide loan guarantees under this section, consistent with section 503 of the Credit Reform Act; and

(2) include in the terms and conditions a requirement that the decision to provide a loan guarantee to a financial institution and the amount of the guarantee does not in any way depend on the purpose, function, or identity of the organization to which the financial institution has made, or intends to make, a loan.

SEC. 5. COMPENSATION OF VICTIMS; REQUIREMENT OF INCLUSION IN LIST OF CRIMES ELIGIBLE FOR COMPENSATION.

Section 1403(d)(3) of the Victims of Crime Act of 1984 (42 U.S.C. 10602(d)(3)) is amended by inserting "crimes, whose victims suffer death or personal injury, that are described in section 247 of title 18, United States Code," after "includes".

SEC. 6. AUTHORIZATION FOR ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL TO ASSIST STATE AND LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT.

There are authorized to be appropriated to the Department of the Treasury and the Department of Justice, including the Community Relations Service, in fiscal years 1996 and 1997 such sums as are necessary to increase the number of personnel, investigators, and technical support personnel to investigate, prevent, and respond to potential violations of sections 247 and 844 of title 18, United States Code.

SEC. 7. REAUTHORIZATION OF HATE CRIMES STATISTICS ACT.

The first section of the Hate Crimes Statistics Act (28 U.S.C. 534 note) is amended—

(1) in subsection (b), by striking "for the calendar year 1990 and each of the succeeding 4 calendar years" and inserting "for each calendar year"; and

(2) in subsection (c), by striking "1994" and inserting "2002".

SEC. 8. SENSE OF THE CONGRESS.

The Congress—

(1) commends those individuals and entities that have responded with funds to assist in the rebuilding of places of worship that have been victimized by arson; and

(2) encourages the private sector to continue these efforts so that places of worship that are victimized by arson, and their affected communities, can continue the rebuilding process with maximum financial support from private individuals, businesses, charitable organizations, and other non-profit entities.

Approved July 3, 1996.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY—H.R. 3525 (S. 1890):

HOUSE REPORTS: No. 104-621 (Comm. on the Judiciary).

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, Vol. 142 (1996):

June 18, considered and passed House.

June 26, considered and passed Senate, amended.

June 27, House concurred in Senate amendment.

WEEKLY COMPILATION OF PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS, Vol. 32 (1996):

July 3, Presidential statement.