Against All Odds: Seeking Justice in Illinois After a Hate Crime

By Rachel Schwartz

On May 25 this year, a Batavia resident named Ben (a pseudonym) opened his mail to find an anonymous note handwritten in black marker. The note included derogatory names for Latinos and gay men. “Deport both,” it read.

The message was scrawled over a printed screen grab of a Facebook post from a week before about recent ICE raids in local restaurants. Ben had not written the post, but had reacted to it with an angry emoji.

Ben did not know who might have sent the letter. He also did not know that other residents across Kane and DuPage Counties had received similar mail.

When Ben called the police, the responding officer took his report and collected the letter for evidence, telling him, “This is why I tell my kids not to be on social media.”

Most hate crime reports do not materialize as cases, and even fewer result in guilty pleas or convictions.

Chicago hate crimes from 2011-2016 led to...

- **208** Reports by police to FBI
- **31** Cases charged as hate crimes by SAO
- **18** Guilty pleas/convictions

In November 2017, we reported that a hate crime can get “lost” at many steps along its way to national FBI statistics, from a victim choosing not to report, to a police department failing to identify a hate crime or pass it along to the FBI.
However, even when law enforcement identifies a hate crime, victims face an uphill battle in bringing those crimes to court. One in five hate crime reports materializes as a case, and less than one in ten results in a guilty plea or verdict.

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