

## COPWATCH

The Federal HATE CRIMES STATISTICS ACT, first introduced by Congressman Conyers, is now in effect. This ACT requires the U.S. Department of Justice to keep statistics on crimes motivated by bigotry, such as those against gays and lesbians.

To the best of our knowledge, no police department anywhere in Michigan has taken any significant steps to institute this kind of data collection. We are in the process of contacting police departments to ascertain what actions they are taking.

A recent survey of the gay community in New York City found that only a tiny fraction of crimes against the gay community were ever even reported to the police -- in large measure because they believed that the police would not act or would harass them. We doubt that the situation is any better in Michigan, and we are beginning our own survey to prove whether it is correct or not.

A "COMMUNITY WATCH COALITION" has been planned for a long time by the LESBIAN GAY FOUNDATION of MICHIGAN. We have learned that communities in some other states have such projects in action, and that they have been very successful.

The first project of the COALITION is a watch on what the police do, to keep records of that activity, and to make reports. We have code named this project COPWATCH. We will record both good and bad activities of police forces in Michigan so that the public can know what goes on. In addition, we are keeping records of bias crimes so that we can check the accuracy of police reports to the Department of Justice.

We are inviting organizations in Michigan to join this COALITION to watch and keep records on various activities of law enforcement agencies. There will be no dues or charges for organizations to become members of the COMMUNITY WATCH COALITION (CWC). All we want from them is their good will and help in getting out the word that the COALITION exists and is willing and able to take reports. At least for now, we plan this COALITION as only a statistical data gathering and reporting organization. Many persons in need of help will be referred to other agencies.

We do not envision this COALITION as only a lesbian/gay affiliation, but instead we want a broad based assortment of minorities. We want to especially cover all groups that are covered by the Federal Hate Crimes Statistics Act and/or the Michigan "Ethnic Intimidation Law."