

DC Criminal Defense Lawyers

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June 28, 2010

DC Criminal Court Finds Two Men Guilty of Assault with Bias Enhancement

With the identification of "hate crimes," a person's motive in an assault becomes key in the development of charges. While [DC criminal defense attorneys](#) work to get their clients' charges lessened or dismissed, a person's alleged motive for an attack could actually lead to enhanced charges.

On June 16, the Washington DC Metropolitan Police Department announced that two men charged in a 2009 robbery and assault were convicted, and that a bias enhancement was added to their charges. Michael Cowan, 23, and Vernon Long, 25, were found guilty of robbing and beating two men, at least one of whom they perceived to be homosexual.

The incident, which occurred in November 2009, took place when Cowan, Long, and several other men robbed and attacked two teenagers, aged 17 and 19, as they were leaving a DC convenience store. After stealing the victims' jackets, Cowan and Long beat them. Cowan was charged with continuing the attack based on his perception of the sexual orientation of one of the victims. He admitted to police that he used a derogatory term to reference the victim's perceived homosexuality as he beat him. Because the attack continued as a direct result of Cowan's belief that the victim was gay, the bias enhancement was added to his charges. [Washington DC criminal defense lawyers](#) know that bias crimes, or hate crimes, stipulate greater penalties.

Cowan and Long were found guilty of two counts of robbery, one count of assault with a dangerous weapon/ bias-related crime, and one count of assault with significant injury/ bias-related crime. They will be sentenced on July 26.

The District of Columbia is not alone having bias crime statutes. Forty-five other states have also passed hate crime laws; 32 of them cover bias-motivated violence on the basis of sexual orientation. A [DC criminal defense attorney](#) must consider the alleged motive when defending a client against bias-enhanced assault charges.