



MEDIA RELEASE

The New York City Anti-Violence Project calls on legislators to pass the Matthew Shepard Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act

For Immediate Release

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New York – The New York City Anti-Violence Project (AVP) is calling on legislators to pass the Matthew Shepard Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act (LLEHCPA), also known as the Matthew Shepard Act, currently pending in the U.S. House of Representatives and recently introduced in the U.S. Senate. The legislation, sponsored in the House by John Conyers (D-Mich.) and Mark Kirk (D-Ill.) and in the Senate by Senators Edward Kennedy (D-MA), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Olympia Snowe (R-ME), Susan Collins (R-ME), and Arlen Specter (D-PA), would grant federal protection to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) victims of hate crimes.

“The Anti-Violence Project commends the bill’s sponsors for taking a strong stand against hate violence,” said Sharon Stapel, Executive Director of the New York City Anti-Violence Project, “This bill, which amends current hate crime law to include sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and disability, sends a powerful message that we will not tolerate anti-LGBT violence. In today’s world, which is so diverse, we cannot condone violence based on actual or perceived identity – because if we do, we are all vulnerable. We must all support this bill so that we can all live our lives without fear.”

AVP believes that key portions of this bill are vital to protect the LGBT communities from bias-motivated hate violence. By removing the current prerequisite that the victim be engaging in a federally-protected activity, like voting or going to school, the bill protects a greater number of hate violence victims and does not mandate a victim’s behavior when they choose to seek the protection of the federal government. Giving federal authorities greater ability to engage in hate crimes investigations that local authorities choose not to pursue will allow victims in localities that are not LGBT-friendly the equal protection against hate violence that they deserve. The requirement that the FBI to track statistics on hate crimes against transgender people provides critical assistance to victims who are often ignored by law enforcement and will allow the country to more accurately measure the occurrence of hate crimes.

The proposed bill offers vital protection to those who need it most. LGBT people of color, people of transgender experience, and homeless LGBT people are often more frequently targets for violence because offenders believe that their actions against these communities will be ignored. We are hopeful that these changes to the Federal Hate Crimes Law would encourage those most targeted for violence in

our communities to report and seek support and while we would also encourage law makers to consider funding for community based prevention initiatives and law enforcement training on recognizing and responding sensitively to hate crime victims and their families, we believe this is the first of many steps necessary to eradicate hate violence. Although the proposed bill does not address enhanced penalties, AVP remains opposed to the enhanced penalties that the current hate crimes law includes because they have not been shown to be preventative and, because of the inherent racism and classism in the criminal justice system and the targeting of LGBT people by law enforcement, often negatively impact the very communities they are intended to protect.

The New York City Anti-Violence Project is dedicated to eliminating hate violence, sexual assault, stalking, and domestic violence in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and HIV-affected communities through counseling, advocacy, organizing and public education. AVP is a member of the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP).

In 2008, the Anti-Violence Project served over 2,000 victims of violence. The Anti-Violence Project's Safe Dating and Internet Safe Dating Tips, as well as NCAVP's annual reports on hate violence and domestic violence, can be accessed online at www.avp.org or by calling 212-714-1184.

The Anti-Violence Project provides free and confidential assistance to LGBTQH victims and survivors of violence through its 24-hour bilingual hotline: 212-714-114.