

## U.S. Attorney's Report to the District

Commemorating the Shepard Byrd Hate Crimes Prevention Act

The enactment of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act in October 2009 was a landmark in the battle against bias-motivated violence. The act expanded the jurisdictional reach of federal investigators and prosecutors, provided resources to local authorities to assist them in the prosecution of hate crimes, and for the first time in federal law, established protections for persons targeted for violence on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability. The Department of Justice has made vigorous use of the law, convicting 47 defendants since early 2010 for a variety of violent acts motivated by hate. In this district for example, this office and the Civil Rights Division recently concluded the prosecution of three white supremacists for an unprovoked attack on a white man and his African-American friend at a gas station in Yuba City, California. Those three defendants are now serving lengthy federal prison terms.

Last November, shortly after the fifth anniversary of the enactment of the Shepard Byrd Act, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder announced that the Department of Justice would sponsor a series of pilot programs around the country to commemorate the anniversary of the law, raise awareness with the public and with local jurisdictions about the importance of reporting hate crimes, build trust between law enforcement and impacted communities, and educate our state and local law enforcement partners about federal hate crimes including the Shepard Byrd Act. On April 2, the first of those pilot programs was held in Sacramento.

In the morning, this office, the Civil Rights Division and the FBI provided a half-day training program for over 60 local law enforcement officers and investigators. I opened the program together with Monica Miller, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI Sacramento Field Office. Substantive instruction was provided by an Assistant U.S. Attorney, an FBI Supervisory Special Agent, and Chiraag Bains, the Senior Counsel to the Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. The most riveting part of the program, however, was the participation of Judy and Dennis Shepard, parents of Matthew Shepard, whose brutal murder in a hate crime in Wyoming in 1998 shocked the nation, and whose name is enshrined in the statute.

Since the tragic death of their son, Judy and Dennis, through the Matthew Shepard Foundation, have been tireless advocates for equality and tolerance. They speak softly but eloquently, with courage and conviction.

In the afternoon of the same day, Judy and Dennis Shepard were the centerpiece of a community forum at California State University Sacramento, which brought together over 100 members of the community – people of all colors and many ethnicities, gay and straight, Jewish and Muslim, elected officials, students, and members of the media. During a panel discussion and subsequent question and answer session, the forum addressed the Shepard Byrd Act, the investigation of hate crimes, police-community relations, and other issues. Judy and Dennis Shepard both made passionate appeals for community members to engage with and educate

members of law enforcement, to report hate crimes, and to press their elected representatives for additional changes. The event concluded with a standing ovation for our visitors from Wyoming.

While recent years have been a period of tremendous change, particularly for issues relating to LGBT equality, much work still needs to be done. Too many instances of hate-motivated violence still occur, and too many of those instances still go unreported. Events like the one recently held in Sacramento, soon to be replicated elsewhere, may help.

If you would like to communicate with our office, contact the main number in Sacramento, or submit a suggestion by clicking on the button below. Thank you.

United States Attorney

*Benjamin B. Wagner*