



Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

05/18/10

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HATE CRIMES CONFERENCE BRINGS TOGETHER LAW ENFORCEMENT AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

Over 300 Attend and Discuss New Law, Law Enforcement Awareness

ATLANTA, GA – Over 300 officers from local, state and federal law enforcement agencies joined with community groups and other concerned citizens at Georgia State University today to discuss implementing and enforcing the new federal hate crimes statute. The conference specifically addressed the “Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act,” which was signed into law by President Obama on October 18, 2009. According to the Justice Department in Washington D.C., the conference in Atlanta was not only the first to bring together law enforcement, prosecutors and affected community groups, but is expected to serve as a model for the rest of the country to educate and sensitize those who have a critical stake in the new law.

The event was co-sponsored by the United States Attorney’s Office and the Atlanta Field Office of the FBI. United States Attorney Sally Quillian Yates said, “It was gratifying to see so many concerned law enforcement officers and community representatives come together today to discuss the enforcement of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act. This legislation is particularly important here in Georgia since there is no comprehensive state hate crimes statute. This conference has been an important first step in our efforts to ensure that we zealously protect the rights of citizens in Georgia who are victims of violent hate crimes.”

FBI Atlanta Special Agent in Charge Brian Lamkin added, “As the designated investigative agency with jurisdiction regarding these types of violations, the FBI looks forward to working with our local and state counterparts involving such acts. This will be a historical venture in the State of Georgia in that there has never been a specific state law to enforce hate crimes violations.”

“The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Hate Crimes Prevention Act is essential because, sadly, hate crimes and the intolerance that breeds them remain all too prevalent in our nation. We look forward to working with law enforcement in Georgia to educate communities about the new law and prevent hate crimes from occurring in the first

place," said Assistant Attorney General Thomas E. Perez of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division in Washington, D.C.

This new civil rights law makes it a federal crime to willfully cause or attempt to cause bodily injury to another person with any dangerous weapon because of (1) the person's actual or perceived race, color, religion, or national origin; or (2) the person's actual or perceived religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability if the crime affected interstate or foreign commerce or occurred within federal jurisdiction.

One of the key speakers at today's conference was Dave O'Malley, retired Chief of the Laramie (Wyoming) Police Department. O'Malley was a commander in the Laramie Police Department on October 6, 1998 – the day University of Wyoming student Matthew Shepard was lured from a Laramie bar by two men pretending to be gay, driven to a remote area, tied to a fence, beaten and pistol whipped. He was found comatose and died six days later. The perpetrators admitted that they sought out Shepard and beat him because he was gay. After Shepard's murder, O'Malley, who has said he is ashamed of his former attitudes toward gay people, became an outspoken proponent of the new federal hate crimes law. O'Malley told the assembled group today that it is critical that law enforcement become sensitive to any potential victims and be supportive and thorough in the reporting of such hate crimes. Matthew Shepard's father also briefly addressed the audience in an emotional remembrance of his son.

The new law carries Shepard's name as well as the name of James Byrd, Jr. Byrd, an African American, was also murdered in 1998 when three men in Jasper, Texas, wrapped a chain around his ankles, hooked the chain to a pickup truck and then dragged him for miles over rural roads outside of Jasper. Byrd was targeted by his killers because of his race.

The conference in Atlanta also included a panel discussion devoted to fostering cooperation between non-governmental organizations and law enforcement. Panelists included Cheryl Courtney-Evans, Founder and Executive Director of TILTT, Inc. (Transgender Individuals Living Their Truth); Reverend Paul Graetz, Senior Pastor of First Metropolitan Community Church of Atlanta; Elaine Levine, representing Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights; Dr. Jenny Manders, Disability Studies Coordinator at the University of Georgia; Melinda Morgan, Operations Director of Georgia Equality, Inc.; Brenda Muhammad, Director of the Atlanta Victim Assistance, Inc., Bill Nigut, Southeast Regional Director of the Anti-Defamation League; and Salim Shermohammed, representing the Ismaili Council for the Southeastern United States. Panelists agreed that the new federal law could have significant impact within their groups and the community.

Anyone with information about a potential hate crime is encouraged to call FBI Atlanta at 404-679-9000.

For further information please contact Sally Quillian Yates, United States Attorney, or Charysse L. Alexander, Executive Assistant United States Attorney, through Patrick Crosby, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Attorney's Office, at (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the HomePage for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan.