



**Judy and Dennis Shepard**  
**Statement: Shepard-Byrd Act**

In 2008 Barack Obama was elected President. He understood the historical effects of discrimination and the need for equal opportunities for all Americans. After much lobbying and, finally, verbal public acknowledgement, a law was passed and signed on October 28, 2009. It was the Matthew Shepard James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act – the first federal law to criminalize violence against members of the LGBTQ community. It expanded protections found in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, including some key protections for gender, gender identity, disability, and sexual orientation. It gave federal prosecutors and state district attorneys additional options to pursue to prosecute hate crimes. It also provided additional funding, if needed, for local and state law enforcement in the investigation and prosecution of alleged hate crimes.

A week from now, we will celebrate the ten-year anniversary of that hate crime law and I'm proud to say that 10 years after its signing, 60 convictions have been made under the Shepard-Byrd Act, bringing justice to dozens of victims in Matt's name. It has brought an additional weapon into the struggle against hate – helping to protect all citizens, especially those in marginalized communities who have the most to fear and the most to lose, including immigrants, racial and religious minorities, and the LGBTQ community.

The Shepard-Byrd Act is the law of the land and is needed now more than ever. Unfortunately, we have seen government funding and resources shift to fighting international terrorism in the decade since the passage of Shepard-Byrd, despite the fact that hate crimes have led to far more deaths of Americans here at home. Acts that would be considered domestic terrorism in any other country.

We don't want to see another incident or life lost as we lost Matt. Any loss of life, any loss of a job, any loss of desire to work towards fulfilling a person's dreams and goals because of hate related words or actions is a loss to the local community where that person lives, a loss to the state where that person lives, and a loss to this country.

We look forward to a re-focus on the causes of hate crimes and the reduction of hate crime incidents as America changes direction and moves forward towards a more equal and just country