

“Our lives are forever changed. I am grateful that my healing allows me to feel more, even when that which I feel is the loss of my beautiful baby boy. Even when the feelings are so hard.”

— Gabi Clayton whose openly-bisexual son, 17, committed suicide after being the victim of a hate crime.

issue paper

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)

“It scared me to death,” Georgia Feiste remembers. She was home alone at 10 p.m., when a bullet pierced through the kitchen window, narrowly missing her. It was the latest in a string of escalating attacks on the Feistes by classmates of their then-16-year-old gay son. It began with pranks Feiste thought of as “harmless kid stuff,” like eggs thrown at the their house. But before long, the family car was vandalized and a molotov cocktail bomb landed in their front yard. Then Georgia Feiste was shot at as she stood in her kitchen. “They were targeting our whole family, because our son is

HATE CRIMES

gay,” Feiste says. When local police finally

confronted the teens, they confessed. But the perpetrators were not charged with hate crimes. Feiste suspects the police “just didn’t want to deal with it.”

ABOUT HATE CRIMES

Anti-gay hate crimes are those in which victims are chosen solely or primarily because of their actual or presumed sexual/affectional orientation or preference, gender identity and/or status.¹ Hate crimes are also committed based on race, religion, disability, ethnicity and national origin.² Hate crimes may include property crimes or physical violence resulting in injury. Hate crimes are unique because they send messages to entire groups — as well as to their families and other supporters — that they are

unwelcome and unsafe in particular communities.

HURT FAMILIES

Most anti-gay hate crimes are committed by otherwise

law-abiding young people who see little wrong with their actions,³ and who sometimes believe that they have societal permission to engage in such violence.⁴

LASTING IMPACT OF HATE CRIMES

Because anti-gay hate crimes are attacks on identity, they may have more serious psychological effects on victims than do other crimes. Depression, stress and anger are more prevalent in hate crime survivors than in survivors of comparable non-bias-motivated crimes. These feelings can last up to five years for gay and lesbian victim of hate crimes, while lasting up to two years for victims of non-bias-related crimes.⁵

No similar studies have been conducted on families of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered (g/l/b/t) people. But anecdotal experience suggests that the more severe, lasting effects g/l/b/t people experience after hate crimes can be reasonably extrapolated to family members of victims, or families who are themselves targeted.

Minneapolis, MN:
Soon after moving into a new home, a Black lesbian and her child are the targets of verbal slurs from neighbors. When a burned cross is left outside their door, they move.

Eastern Iowa:
Anti-gay epithets are scrawled on a street sign near the farm of a family that supports its gay child.

Corvallis, OR:
A gay high school student is beaten while walking home from school. The boy's family cannot afford the dental bills incurred in the attack, so PFLAG and local groups raise the funds.

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DIRECT IMPACT ON FAMILIES

While they share some of the long-term effects of hate crime victims, there are some implications that are unique to family members. They may feel guilty for not having protected their g/l/b/t loved ones. Like those actually targeted by hate crimes, families may feel isolated or helpless. Their effectiveness on the job, at home or in school may be affected. If the perpetrator is not arrested and convicted, they may lose faith in the justice system. Light sentencing may cause further disillusionment.

In addition to the psychological affects hate crimes have on families, there are practical concerns, as well. Depending on the crime, there may be repairs to pay for, or medical bills or funeral expenses. Trials and court appearances can prolong the grieving process, as can parole hearings. If there is media coverage of the hate crime, a family may find itself dealing with intensely personal issues very publicly.⁶

FAMILIES MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Through community education and legislative advocacy, families nationwide are bringing attention to hate crimes, as well as to vehicles that can help prevent bias-motivated crime.

The Hate Crimes Prevention Act (HCPA) remains in Congress. It would strengthen existing federal hate crime laws by allowing the U.S. Dept. of Justice to assist in local prosecutions and, where appropriate, to investigate and prosecute cases in which violence occurs because of the victim's sexual orientation, disability or gender. It also would eliminate obstacles to federal involvement in many cases of assault or murder based on race or religion. PFLAG works within diverse local and national coalitions — recognizing commonalities of targeted groups, such as religion, race and ethnicity — to pass HCPA and state hate crime laws. PFLAG also dispels myths about hate crime legislation, noting that it covers acts or violence (not speech) and protects the First Amendment.

In communities nationwide, PFLAG chapters have initiated programs to educate the public about the link between hate speech and violence. In some communities, like Henderson, Kentucky, PFLAG sponsors billboards and newspaper advertisements. Elsewhere, such as in San Diego, California, PFLAG chapters run public service announcements on television.

To learn more about efforts in your community — or to get involved in advocating for state and federal legislation that protects all Americans from bias-motivated crime — call PFLAG at 202-467-8180, or visit our web site, www.pflag.org.

¹ National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs definition.

² U.S. Dept. of Justice definition

³ American Psychological Association, *Hate Crimes Today: An Age-Old Foe in Modern Dress* (1998)

⁴ Franklin, Karen; Washington Institute for Mental Illness Research and Training (as reported by the American Psychological Association)

⁵ Herek, Gregory (University of California, Davis) ; Gillis, Roy J (University of Toronto); Cogan; Jeanine (American Psychological Association); "Psychological Sequelae of Hate Crime Victimization Among Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Adults"; *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* (1999)

⁶ (Entire section) Parents of Murdered Children; *Problems of Survivors* (1999)