

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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PRESS CONTACT

KYLE BAILEY | POLITICAL DIRECTOR  
404.327.9898 MAIN | 404.630.3975 CELL

**BULLYING AND MURDER OF 15-YEAR-OLD LAWRENCE KING POINT TO NEED FOR ANTI-BULLYING AND INCLUSIVE HATE CRIMES LEGISLATION: YOUTUBE USED TO COMMUNICATE WITH LAWMAKERS**

ATLANTA – On February 12, 2008, 15-year-old Lawrence King, who was teased and bullied for being gay, was shot and killed by a classmate in school because of his sexual orientation and gender expression. State lawmakers have the opportunity to prevent tragedies like this from occurring in Georgia's schools and communities by acting on legislation currently pending before the General Assembly.

SB 461 accurately defines the scope and impact of bullying, requires local school systems to work with faculty, parents, and students to adopt and enforce anti-bullying policies, and makes it easier for students and necessary for school employees to report information about bullying. Passing this legislation is a necessary first step towards preventing the type of escalation around bullying that ultimately led to the murder of Lawrence King.

Georgia is one of only five states in the nation without a hate crimes law. GBI Director Vernon Keenan and the Georgia Police Chiefs Association have been asking for an inclusive hate crimes law for several years to properly train and equip officers with the tools necessary to prevent and combat crimes of bias. In addition, The United Methodist Church, Episcopal Church, United Church of Christ, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Presbyterian Church USA, American Jewish Congress, Congress of National Black Churches, and the Unitarian Universalist Association are among those religious organizations that support passage of a hate crimes law including protections on the bases of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Lt. Governor Cagle and Speaker Richardson have the opportunity to allow this legislation to move forward and provide law enforcement with the tools necessary to prevent vicious bias-motivated crimes – like that against Lawrence King – from occurring in Georgia.

**As part of an intensive lobbying effort, Georgia Equality rolled out a YouTube video message to state lawmakers this morning in support SB 461 anti-bullying legislation and hate crimes legislation that includes protections on the bases of sexual orientation and gender identity.**

To view Georgia Equality's YouTube video "Lawrence King: A message to lawmakers", please visit:

**<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJSpeUISbho>**

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*Georgia Equality is the political advocacy voice of Georgia's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender citizens and their allies. Founded in 1995, Georgia Equality is a statewide organization known nationally as one of the leaders among state and local LGBT groups.*

**Georgia Equality | PO Box 95425 | Atlanta, GA 30347 | 404.327.9898 | 404.327.9897 fax**

**[www.georgiaequality.org](http://www.georgiaequality.org)**