



Equality Pennsylvania

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**STATEMENT OF EQUALITY PENNSYLVANIA:
The Murder of Murray Seidman and Hate Crimes**

Harrisburg: This past January, a 70-year-old man was stoned to death by a younger friend who alleged the victim made unwanted sexual advances. According to authorities, 28-year-old John Thomas of Lansdowne said he killed Murray Seidman because the Old Testament refers to stoning gay people.

Equality Pennsylvania reaches out with condolences to the family and friends of Mr. Seidman. We offer our sincere support for your loss. The media has reported that he lived a dignified life as an independent man who overcame the challenges of being developmentally disabled, who worked long hours and offered his friendship and a good word to everyone he met. Like so many tragedies, this one is senseless; the loss of Mr. Seidman is one that will be felt by many and hopefully will be recognized for what it is by law enforcement and the LGBT community - a brutal and gruesome crime motivated by the real or perceived notion of the victim's sexuality.

It is impossible for Equality Pennsylvania to let this moment pass by without once more calling attention to the absolute lack of hate crimes protections in Pennsylvania. Expanded hate crimes protections were passed in 2002 by the General Assembly and signed into law by Republican Governor Mark Schweiker. This law was successfully used by police officers, prosecutors and district attorneys to address a number of serious hate crimes which occurred in the Commonwealth. Unfortunately in May 2008, this law was overturned on a technicality unrelated to the substance of the law itself.

For those who would claim that all crimes are driven by hate, let them pay special attention to the killer's distinct and stated motivation in this heinous act. Surely, nothing could be clearer than the fact that this man was targeted because he was perceived to be both gay and an easy target due to his mental disability. Certainly compassionate people - especially those with the power to change the law to protect all Pennsylvanians - can come to the honorable conclusion that Murray Seidman's death was not something that can be easily brushed aside as just another murder. Rather, it was a malicious act motivated by vicious anti-LGBT hatred. Equality Pennsylvania calls for those in power to use the clarity of this tragic moment to produce a positive result and once again enact a strong hate crimes law that says no individual should be targeted in a violent way for who they are or who they love.

In Pennsylvania, we need a strong Hate Crimes law which adds back into the Ethnic Intimidation and Institutional Vandalism Act" the same protected classes that were signed into the amended law in 2002 ("actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, gender, mental or physical disability, and ancestry."). Equality Pennsylvania is committed to that goal. Our mission is to be the preeminent LGBT advocacy organization for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and work collaboratively to establish a comprehensive network of individuals and organizations united in securing equal rights for the LGBT community (www.equalitypa.org).