



Remarks of Lorri L. Jean, CEO, L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center
February 15, 2008 Press Conference re: the Murder of Lawrence King

We are here today because of the tragic murder of 15 year old Lawrence King in Oxnard. A boy who was just coming to terms with his sexuality and identity and was being honest about it. We're also here because of his killer, Brandon McInerney, the 14 year old boy who shot Lawrence dead because he was gay. But mostly we are here because of what this horrible incident represents.

First, let me say that our hearts go out to Lawrence and his friends and loved ones. And I say the same to Brandon and his friends and loved ones. This event is a terrible tragedy, but it's even more so because Lawrence and Brandon were still children. Their lives had barely begun. One was violently cut short and the other's hope for a normal, decent life is over. Two young people, full of promise with their whole lives ahead of them...all hope gone just like that, with the pull of a trigger.

Lawrence suffered the ultimate act of violence. He is dead and Brandon is alive. In that very basic way their situations cannot be compared. But there is a bigger picture here. Both of these children were victims. Victims of a society that continues to teach that it is permissible to exclude, revile and even hate gay people and anyone who does not conform to traditional gender stereotypes.

Brandon pulled the trigger, but bigotry and hatred loaded the gun.

No one is born hating gay and transgender people or believing that we should be denied equal rights. Such hatred and bigotry must be learned. It is learned in families that don't accept their own children if they're different than the norm. It is learned in right wing churches where ministers preach abomination or in schools where teachers and administrators don't protect LGBT kids from bullying and harassment. It is learned from political leaders who support blatant discrimination against us or whose leadership fails them when it's time to speak out and take action on behalf of our equality and our humanity.

All of these behaviors suggest that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people are fair game for bigotry and hatred. They encourage impressionable young people to fear and hate not only themselves, but others. And too often this hatred takes the form of violence and innocent young people end up dead. Nothing is "pro-family" about that.

We're standing here in the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center's Jeff Griffith Youth Center. Every week 100's of homeless kids come here for help they couldn't find anywhere else. They come from all over the country. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender kids who have been failed by the adults

in their lives. Failed by parents, who kicked them out only because of who they love or their gender identity. Failed by teachers and school administrators who did not protect them from bullying and harassment. Failed by right-wing preachers who reviled them. Failed by political leaders who didn't stand up for them or, worse, who actually urged discrimination against them.

And, where are all of the so-called family values leaders today?
Where are the religious political extremists who claim to care about kids but who are actually trying to repeal laws in California that protect young people from this kind of violence?
Where are the political leaders who preach anti-gay discrimination?
They're nowhere. Instead of condemning anti-gay and anti-transgender hate crimes and violence, they say nothing. They are silent and it's despicable.

To all of these people I say—Lawrence King's blood and Brandon's ruined life are on your heads. Your bigotry loaded the gun. Your example made Brandon think it was OK to pull the trigger. And you have a responsibility to do something to make sure this never happens again. As do all of us!

Today we call upon extremist clergy who preach anti-gay hatred and abomination to stop.
We call upon parishioners whose church leaders are trying to repeal laws that would protect the Lawrence Kings of tomorrow to demand that such hateful activity stop.
We are calling upon school districts and administrators to put policies in place that require swift action and protection when students like Lawrence King are threatened and bullied. Stop these behaviors *before* they lead to violence and death.

We are calling upon political leaders to speak out against discrimination and exclusion, against bigotry and hatred and to make it clear that ALL Americans, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, are entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, including young people. We are calling upon decent and fair-minded people everywhere to realize that anti-LGBT bigotry has got to stop.