



HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
CAMPAIGN®

April 30, 2009

The Honorable Virginia Foxx  
1230 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC

Dear Congresswoman Foxx:

Yesterday afternoon, as the US House of Representatives debated the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act, I sat in the House Gallery, watching the proceedings with Judy Shepard, Matthew's mother. Although we were certainly pleased with the outcome of the final vote, we were shocked and appalled that you dishonored Matthew's name, hurt his grieving mother, and outright misrepresented history when you called Matthew's hate-motivated murder a "hoax." The truth of the matter—which was presented in court and supported by the evidence—is that the two men who pistol-whipped Matthew, tied him to a fence in a remote area, and left him to die alone did so because he was gay. That is why the chief investigator in the case, Commander David O'Malley, has spoken out passionately in favor of this legislation, and against unfounded representations of this murder as anything but a hate crime.

I'm sure that as a parent and grandparent, you can imagine how difficult it was for Judy Shepard to hear this falsehood uttered on the floor of the United States Congress. Your words were not only difficult to hear, they were flat-out wrong. Matthew's murder, as egregious as it was, is only one of thousands of hate crimes that occur in this country every year. Judy Shepard continues to fight not only for Matthew but for every parent who has lost a child, for every young person living in fear that they will be targeted for their race, religion, color, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender, or disability. And your words have consequences not only for her, but for all of them.

Given your views on issues of importance to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans, I doubt that there is much of anything we might ever agree on. I would hope, however, that we can agree to maintain civil discourse and common decency as these issues are debated – particularly on the floor of the US House of Representatives.

I realize that in the aftermath of your insensitive comments, you have conceded that your choice of words may have been insensitive. I request that you also apologize to Judy Shepard for what you said and for the pain that it clearly caused her. Judy and I have grown used to this sort of mean-spirited rhetoric, but it never gets any easier to hear. You might never come to agree with the outcome of yesterday's vote, but I would hope that you would agree that the right thing to do thing to do is to apologize to this mother who lost her son to a despicable crime, and who has dedicated her life to ensuring that others do not experience the kind of tragedy that has forever altered her own life.

Regardless of what opponents of this bill might say, the LGBT community has no wish to silence anyone's beliefs. We ask only that bills like this one be debated on the merits, and that opponents do not rely upon falsehoods, especially those that inflict so much hurt on decent people like Judy and every victim and family.

Sincerely,

Joe Solmonese, President