



An Oklahoma Where Everyone is Equal

MEDIA STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Oklahoma State Senate Votes to Obstruct Federal Hate Crimes Law

Tulsa – March 11 – [The Equality Network](#) (TEN) is outraged by the [Oklahoma State Senate's 39-6 vote](#) in support of SB 1965, a bill that forces state law enforcement officials to obstruct the provisions of the federal Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Protection Act that protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. Using an amendment to gut the language of a bill that had been filed to create a task force to study the Oklahoma Secondary School Activities Association, Senator [Steve Russell](#) (R-Oklahoma City) inserted the original text of [SB 2165](#), a bill that the Senate Judiciary Committee had declined to pass on to the floor.

The new SB 1965 leaves LGBT Oklahomans no legal recourse if they are victims of hate crimes. Not only does the state hate crimes law exclude sexual orientation or gender identity, but SB 1965 also prevents law enforcement officials from asking for federal assistance in enforcing the LGBT-inclusive federal hate crimes law. The bill does not seek to repeal federal or state hate crimes protections accorded on the basis of race, national origin, religion, or disability. Instead, it intentionally excludes only hate crimes perpetrated on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity, two categories added to federal hate crimes law by the U.S. Congress in October 2009.

“Senator Russell’s bill is truly terrifying in its implications.” warns Kathy L. Williams, Ph.D., president of The Equality Network. “This legislation sends the message that violence against LGBT Oklahomans is acceptable. It also sets a chilling precedent that Oklahoma will only enforce certain federal laws and cooperate only with selected federal agencies. We believe this unconstitutional and blatantly discriminatory bill will harm all Oklahomans, regardless of their identity and regardless of whether they are victims of hate crimes.”

SB 1965 will now be considered by the Oklahoma House of Representatives. If the measure passes the House and is signed by Governor Brad Henry, it will become state law.

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The Equality Network works to achieve equality and to secure legal protection for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Oklahomans through advocacy, coalition building, and individual empowerment in the political process..