

LETTERS

Group deplores student's murder

His name was Matthew Shepard. On Oct. 12, 1998, he became another victim of violent death in a society with far too much of it. Matthew's brutal killing became a rallying point for people opposed to targeting victims because of something they are, something they did not choose. Matthew was gay.

Although not all of the facts are in, every indication is that the two men who allegedly killed Matthew targeted him, at least in part, because he was gay. We condemn such behavior in the strongest terms.

In recent years 40 states, including New Jersey, have identified crimes committed against individuals because of certain characteristics as "hate crimes."

When a person is victimized because of race, ethnicity, religion, physical disability, gender or sexual orientation, the crime committed is no more heinous, but the motivation becomes more

sinister and inhumane. Anyone who can be identified as belonging to a certain ethnic group or possessing a certain disability or having a different sexual orientation becomes a target.

The Monmouth County Human Relations Commission has long vigorously opposed discriminating against people on the basis of their race, religion, ethnicity, physical attributes, gender or sexual orientation.

We deplore what happened to Matthew and call on all people of good will to express in their daily living an understanding and tolerance for those who may be different from themselves.

We call on all people of Monmouth County to stand up to instances of discrimination they witness and speak out against them. We should expect and accept nothing less. You can make a difference.

JANICE G. SWEENEY
DR. CAROLYN SCHWEBEL
Monmouth County
Human Relations
Commission
Freehold Township

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