

HOT topic

Why are you an ally?

can be given for a crime if prosecutors prove a victim was targeted for being identified with one of those categories.

Although legislators have introduced bills to add sexual orientation to the law in both houses of the legislature, the issue has lost momentum in recent years. The "Matthew Shepard Memorial Act" fell just 10 votes short of passing in the 1999-2000 session. But subsequent reintroductions of the bill have not made it out of committee.

"Introducing certain bills is about making judgment calls on whether those bills are appropriate for that year and if they can pass," said Rep. Verla Insko, D-Orange, who co-sponsored the House version of the bill in 1999. "We often consult with Equality North Carolina and take their lead on issues to a certain extent."

But Equality North Carolina, the state's largest advocacy organization for securing the rights of the state's LGBT citizens, is focused on lobbying other issues because previous hate crime bills have been unsuccessful, said Ian Palmquist, executive director of the organization.

"It's an issue we continue to work on but think other issues will likely see movement before those changes are made to the bill," Palmquist said. No bill to amend the state hate crime law has been introduced this session.

Hate crime legislation regarding sexual orientation often sparks heated debate because opponents of such laws say that they create "special laws for special people" when the law is supposed to be neutral, Shepard said.

But as the LGBT community becomes more of a mainstream presence in society, however, Insko said that amending the hate crime law to include sexual orientation will become less of a "hot button." Bills regarding civil rights and protection for gays and lesbians have less opposition compared to years past, Insko said.

Judy Shepard shared that view in her presentation, saying that increased visibility will help future lawmakers to establish understanding for gays and lesbians, resulting in more legal protection for the LGBT community.

"What's happening in our state legislatures is the same thing happening in Congress in Washington," Shepard said. "Current leaders are from a generation brought up to think that everything gay was just the worst... But when people of a younger age are elected and in office these things will be gone."

Nationally, the legal protections are much the same as in North Carolina. Federal hate crime laws do not include sexual orientation as a category for consideration, although the "Federal Hate Crime Statistics Act" does collect data on crimes motivated by the victim's sexual orientation.

When Shepard finished speaking, the audience stood to applaud her. And many lingered in the lobby afterward to discuss her message.

"North Carolina lags so far behind with its hate crimes legislation and I believe that Shepard coming to speak makes the need for expanded hate crime legislation more tangible and undeniable," said Jason Wang, a UNC-CH senior who attended the event.



Randi Gordn, First Year

I think that everyone is responsible for the choices that they make in life. Moreover, people can not change the way they feel about others. The fact that there are people who are LGBTQ adds to the diversity in the world and more specifically on our campus. We must learn to accept people for who they are. We are open minded toward different religions, cultures and ways of thinking, so we should be openminded towards people of different sexual orientations.



Chelsea Pickett, First-Year

I'm an ally because I think it delivers a message to heterosexuals that discrimination against someone who has a different sexual orientation is wrong and unacceptable. I think it also shows other heterosexuals that it is ok to interact with others who have different sexual orientations, whatever they may be.



Haley Loftas, First-Year

I'm an ally because I want to reinforce the idea that LGBTQ people aren't diseased, they're people, and they deserve to be treated with the same courtesy and respect that straight people are. Some people say it's unnatural for a person to be LGBTQ, but I can't really see a good reason for someone to fake being gay--there's so much discrimination, hatred, embarrassment, and alienation from judgmental friends & family. If you imagine yourself reversing your sexual orientation, the thought doesn't settle well in your brain. I'm an ally because I don't want LGBTQ people to be pressured by society to change who they are to fit in with the majority on such a personal matter. tions, whatever they may be.



Chris Calascione, First-Year

I don't think people should be discriminated against, I think it's ok to disagree with people, but not discriminate, personally I don't see anything wrong with being LG-BTQ"