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San Francisco Bay Area Independent Media Center

SAN FRANCISCO – Gay-Straight Alliance Network (GSA Network), the Transgender Law Center (TLC), and Equality California (EQCA) are deeply saddened by the shooting of Lawrence King, a gay junior high school student in Oxnard, CA. The 15-year-old victim was shot at E.O. Green Junior High School on Tuesday morning and pronounced brain dead yesterday around 2 pm.

According to reports from friends of Lawrence King speaking to the Los Angeles Times, the victim self-identified as gay, sometimes wore make-up and feminine jewelry, and was the target of ridicule by some of his classmates. Authorities are investigating the shooting as a possible hate crime, but have not confirmed if King was targeted by the shooter because of his sexual orientation or gender expression.

The shooting has been characterized as a “personal” attack and “bad blood” between two students, but advocates caution the violence at the Oxnard junior high is more aptly characterized as a tragic example of widespread homophobia in our schools. Every day young people are subject to bullying or harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity and expression.

While there were reports of the victim receiving support at school due to the bullying he endured, no other bullying prevention efforts have been reported. This terrible event sheds light on the need to provide better education for all students about respect for diversity and differences.

“With young people coming out at younger ages, our schools – especially our junior highs and

middle schools – need to be proactive about teaching respect for diversity based on sexual orientation and gender identity," said Carolyn Laub, executive director of Gay-Straight Alliance Network. "The tragic death of Lawrence King is a wake-up call for our schools to better protect students from harassment at school. As a society, we can prevent this kind of violence from happening."

"We are deeply saddened by this tragedy, which is a grim reminder of the need for all of us to re-double our efforts to protect LGBT youth," said EQCA Executive Director Geoff Kors.

California has laws protecting students from harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression in schools. The California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act was enacted in 2000, and further strengthened through the passage of AB 394 (The Safe Place to Learn Act) and SB 777 (The CA Student Civil Rights Act), which went into effect on January 1, 2008.

"We are proud to live in a state with laws aimed at preventing harassment and violence in schools," said Masen Davis, executive director of the Transgender Law Center "We need strong laws, policies, and programs to keep our young people safe," he continued. "But the sad reality is that even with these protections, violence against gay and gender non-conforming students happens all too often. We must address the culture of bullying in our schools to ensure that all youth have safe places to learn."

GSA Network, the Transgender Law Center, and EQCA extend their condolences to the victim's family and friends, and the entire E.O. Green Junior High School community. Additionally, GSA Network, the Transgender Law Center, and EQCA encourage LGBT youth and families in the Ventura County area to seek out support services from the Ventura County Rainbow Alliance.

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