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## PlanetOut News & Politics

### Lesbian teen's death probed as hate crime

Mark Goebel, Gay.com / PlanetOut.com Network  
 Tuesday, May 13, 2003 / 04:31 PM

Police are treating the fatal stabbing of a 15-year-old New Jersey girl as a potential bias crime.

Sakia Gunn was killed at a bus stop in downtown Newark early Sunday morning while returning with four friends from a party in Manhattan. The victim's mother, LaTona Gunn, said her daughter was gay, and authorities believe her sexual orientation may have been a factor in the killing.

"Based on witness statements, we're investigating the possibility that it may have been a bias crime," said Newark Detective Todd McClennon.

Gunn was stabbed after she and her friends rebuffed advances by two men. Police have issued an arrest warrant for murder suspect Richard McCullough, 29, according to the Associated Press. The second man was questioned by police and not charged; the investigation into his role in the incident continues.

Under New Jersey law, a murder committed because of the victim's sexual

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orientation carries stiffer penalties.

A spokesman for the Newark Police, Lt. Derek Glenn, told the Newark Star-Ledger that the

assailants did not know the girls were gay. "They pulled up in a white station wagon and tried to strike up a conversation with the teenagers," he said. According to Glenn, the girls rebuffed the men and said they were lesbians. A scuffle ensued, and Gunn was stabbed.

Milwaukee, gay youth

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After the suspects fled, Gunn's friends flagged down a motorist, and she was taken to University Hospital in Newark where she was pronounced dead.

Richard Haynes, executive director of the New York City Anti-Violence Project, said he isn't aware of another case in the New York area in which a woman was killed because of her sexual orientation.

"We've had plenty of women who have been brutally attacked," he said. "And we've had cases where transgender women are attacked when men discover the kind of woman they have been flirting with."

Known as "T" to her friends, Gunn liked to play basketball and was a member of her high school team. LaTona Gunn told the New York Times that her daughter's dream was to play in the Women's National Basketball Association.

Gunn said her daughter also liked to wash and style her friends' hair. "She was good," Gunn said. "That's how she made her little money."

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## PlanetOut News & Politics

### Philly Boy Scouts defy anti-gay policy

Mark Goebel, Gay.com / PlanetOut.com Network  
Thursday, May 29, 2003 / 05:23 PM

The Philadelphia area Boy Scout council has unanimously voted to not discriminate against gays, defying the national council's position on homosexuality.

The Cradle of Liberty Council, the nation's third largest Boy Scout group serving 87,000 youths in Philadelphia and two surrounding counties, added "sexual orientation" to its policy of nondiscrimination.

"We disagree with the national stance, and we're not comfortable with the stated national policy," said David H. Lipson Jr., board chairman of the Cradle of Liberty Council.

In June 2000, the Supreme Court ruled in the case of James Dale, an assistant scoutmaster in New Jersey, that the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) had the right to set their own membership standards and exclude gays.

Lipson told the Philadelphia Inquirer that the policy has hurt Boy Scout fund-raising in Southeastern Pennsylvania. According to

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Lipson, Philadelphia-based Pew Charitable Trusts, one of the country's largest foundations, was among several organizations that cut their contributions to the Cradle of Liberty Council.

The Boy Scouts' national anti-gay policy also caused problems for the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania, which came under intense pressure from gay activists for funding a program organized by the Boy Scouts.

"The reality is we did get some pressure from groups who said, 'This program may not discriminate, but this organization does,'" said Christine James-Brown, president of the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania.

The United Way served as a catalyst for the Philadelphia Boy Scout council's change. Two years ago, United Way representatives met with Boy Scout executives and community leaders, including gay and lesbian activists, to discuss the issue.

The Cradle of Liberty's policy change was a result of those discussions.

David Cohen, chairman of United Way of Philadelphia from 1998 to 2001 and a participant, told the Inquirer that the Boy Scout's national policy on gays was clearly hurting local youth programs. "We were not prepared to allow our kids to be casualties on the battlefield of adults who should know better," he said.

Lipson said he didn't want the controversy to overshadow the Boy Scout's many good programs. "We would like to move the discussion to standards for sexual conduct rather than sexual orientation," he added.

This week the national Boy Scouts convention is taking place in Philadelphia, and groups advocating more inclusive scouting are on hand to pressure the Boy Scouts of America to revise its gay ban.

"We're here this week because we believe that the current leaders of the BSA are not living up to the values expressed in the Scout Oath and Law," said Mark Noel, of the New England Coalition for Inclusive Scouting. Noel is an Eagle Scout and former scout leader who was ousted in June 2000 -- against the wishes of his local troop, parents and church -- just two weeks after the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *BSA v. Dale*.

Philadelphia is not the first regional Boy Scout Council to flout the national organization's stance on gays. In July 2001, the Boston Minuteman Council voted to allow gay scouts and gay scout leaders as long as they don't reveal or discuss their sexual orientation.

In addition, a number of United Way organizations, including Los Angeles and Ventura, Calif., and Miami-Dade County, Fla., have cut funding for local Boy Scout councils because of the national policy.

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**Agency: FBI undercounts gay hate crimes**

Mark Goebel, Gay.com / PlanetOut.com Network  
 Tuesday, October 28, 2003 / 05:19 PM

The Federal Bureau of Investigation continues to undercount hate crimes against the GLBT community, according to the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP).

The New York-based nonprofit says that data released on Monday by the FBI showing an 11 percent decrease in 2002 in hate crimes motivated by sexual orientation fell well short of the number tracked by the NCAVP.

"The fact that the FBI's statistics continue to dramatically undercount anti-GLBT hate crimes is something that should give us all pause," said Clarence Patton, NCAVP's acting executive director.

"For NCAVP and its members, which clearly have far fewer resources than the federal government, to consistently report more and more detailed information on hate crimes against GLBT people should truly be a source of embarrassment for the FBI," continued Patton.

According to the FBI, 1,244

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hate crime incidents involving 1,513 GLBT victims were reported in 2002. In sharp contrast, the NCAVP counted 1,968 incidents in only 12 regions.

Milwaukee, gay youth

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"The deficiencies in the FBI's survey point to a series of shortcomings with respect to hate crimes tracking by federal, state and local officials," said Patton. "The FBI only reports on cases sent by local and state law enforcement agencies, and where there is no mandate for those agencies to send information to the FBI, there is no compelling reason for them to do so, beyond simply doing the right thing."

According to NCAVP, in Colorado 96 hate crimes of all types were reported to the FBI in 2002, while the Colorado Anti-Violence Project (CAVP) recorded 159 anti-GLBT incidents alone.

While the number of agencies participating in the hate crimes report reached 12,073, up from 2,771 in 1991 -- the year the FBI began collecting the data -- only 1,868 actually reported a single hate crime.

"It's obvious that serious participation in reporting these crimes under the Hate Crimes Statistics Act of 1990 continues to remain a low priority for many jurisdictions," said Human Rights Campaign Political Director Winnie Stachelberg. "Furthermore, important trends that need to be followed -- such as bias crimes against transgender people -- are not clearly tracked."

Crimes committed in 2002 due to bias against a victim's perceived sexual orientation represent 16.7 percent of reported hate crime incidents -- the highest level in the 12 years since the agency began collecting these statistics.

Sexual orientation bias represents the third highest category of reported hate crimes. Racial bias continues to represent the largest percentage of bias-motivated incidents at 48.8 percent, followed by religious bias at 19.1 percent.

"This extremely disturbing rise in hate crimes against our community underscores the urgent need for passage of a comprehensive hate crimes law," said Stachelberg.

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## News & Politics

### Panel decries gays' HIV 'complacency'

Mark Goebel, Gay.com / PlanetOut.com Network  
Monday, November 17, 2003 / 05:29 PM

On Sunday evening an overflow crowd of more than 300 people squeezed into an auditorium at New York City's LGBT Center for a panel discussion, led by Tony Award-winning actor Harvey Fierstein, about how to reverse the rise in HIV infections in the gay community.

Fierstein, a Broadway veteran honored for his work in "Hairspray" and "Torch Song Trilogy," said he participated in Sunday's forum, "Challenging the Culture of Disease," to remind people that "HIV is still a huge problem in the gay community."

In his opening remarks, Fierstein noted that HIV infection rates were rising "even though we know how to prevent it from being spread."

He added that there are no public awareness programs in New York's gay community. "Which is shocking considering the fact that during the first six months of 2002 we experienced record high new HIV diagnosis," he said. "We must be doing something terribly wrong."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that the number of gay men in the United States diagnosed with HIV increased for the third consecutive year in 2002.

Fierstein said he wasn't blaming AIDS organizations, but wondered why there wasn't more support for HIV-negative men to stay that way.

"We need to resist the normalization of AIDS and build a new grass roots movement to put health back in our community," he added.

Panelist Peter Staley, a founding member of ACT UP and a member of President Clinton's National Task Force on AIDS Drug Development, said that a drug epidemic, specifically crystal meth, was fueling the rise in HIV infections. "Most gay men think that crystal is the next party drug," he said. "It's not. Studies have shown that crystal use often leads to unsafe sex."

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Jeffrey Jones of STOP AIDS San Francisco believes that there has been a breakdown in communication between gay men engaged in sex. "Negative men often are hesitant to bring up the subject of HIV, and positive men often don't tell unless asked," he said. "That needs to change."

Panelists and audience members working with LGBT youth remarked that, during the Bush administration, sex education programs in public schools have increasingly emphasized abstinence, and that condom distribution and frank talk about HIV are becoming rare.

Panelist Dr. David Kim noted that prevention funding for at-risk groups, including gay men, has decreased during Bush's watch.

According to Dennis deLeon, president of the Latino Commission on AIDS, HIV prevention is no longer a priority in the gay community. "The wallet of gay men has basically closed to AIDS," he said.

"The gay community's complacency is overwhelming," said Daniel Carlson, a co-organizer of the forum. "We need another Larry Kramer. Someone to raise hell."

The consensus of audience members and panelists alike was that the gay community can't depend on the government to fund the effective HIV prevention programs.

"We have to take responsibility for the rise in HIV infections across the country and do something about it," said Dr. Bruce Kellerhouse, the forum's other co-organizer.

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