



**EQUALITY
ILLINOIS**

PRESS RELEASE

Founded in 1991, Equality Illinois is the state's oldest, largest and most effective organization advocating for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Illinoisans.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Hate Crime Should Result in Community Response

CHICAGO – The violent hate crime alleged by authorities to have occurred on Chicago's West Side is a deplorable act that Equality Illinois today calls on elected officials and community leaders to denounce in the strongest terms.

As reported by Chicago police, two women walking in the South Austin neighborhood were attacked Saturday night by as many as ten men who taunted them for being lesbian as they punched, kicked and dragged the couple. Police caught one of the alleged perpetrators. He is charged him with two counts of felony hate crimes and two counts of felony robbery.

"To paraphrase what one of the attacked women told the Chicago Tribune, it shouldn't matter who we love, we should be able to walk on the streets safely without fear of attack," said Bernard Cherkasov, CEO of Equality Illinois, the state's oldest and largest advocacy organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Illinoisans.

"We appreciate the work of the Chicago Police Department and the Cook County State's Attorney's Office for the arrest and hate crime charges, and we are confident that they will continue their investigation until more arrests are made," Cherkasov said.

"Now it is time for elected officials and community leaders to denounce the attacks and lead a conversation in the neighborhoods about the unacceptable stigmatizing of people because of their sexual orientation, which can lead to such crimes," he added. "Equality Illinois stands ready to work with local groups and individuals on such programs."

In Illinois, the FBI hate crimes data collected from local agencies show that there were 69 hate crimes reported in 2011 (the latest year for which statistics are available), of which 17, or 24.6 percent, were motivated by the victim's actual or perceived sexual orientation.

"The way to lower the rates is through outreach, engagement, and education. The more people we reach and the more we break down biases, stereotypes, and prejudice, the more we reduce hate and resulting hate crimes," Cherkasov said.

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