



News And Press Releases

Former TSA Employee Sentenced For Federal Hate Crime First Case In The Nation Prosecuted Under Shepard-Byrd Act

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MINNEAPOLIS— Earlier today in federal court in St. Paul, a former employee of the Transportation Security Administration in Minneapolis was sentenced for assaulting an 83-year-old Somali man on May 4, 2010. United States District Court Judge Paul A. Magnuson sentenced George Thompson, age 64, to six months in federal prison on one count of violating the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act. Because the federal justice system does not employ parole, offenders serve virtually their entire sentence behind bars.

Thompson was charged on July 14, 2011, and pleaded guilty on August 10, 2011. At that time, he admitted targeting his elderly victim solely because he believed the man was a Muslim Somali. During the assault, Thompson told the victim to go back to Africa. He also yelled ethnic and religious slurs at him.

Following today's sentencing, Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division in the U.S. Department of Justice, said, "No one should be a victim of assault because of their race or religion. The Department of Justice will continue to use every tool in its arsenal, including the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act." B. Todd Jones, U.S. Attorney for the District of Minnesota, added, "Physical violence motivated by racial or religious hatred exacerbates fear and tears at the fabric of our society. When warranted by the facts and circumstances, we will vigorously prosecute those cases. Here in Minnesota, we have vibrant and diverse communities and should be celebrating that fact, not assaulting people because of it."

The Shepard-Byrd Act, which was signed into law in October of 2009, makes it a federal crime to assault an individual because of his or her actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. The act was named after Matthew Shepard, a gay Wyoming teen who died after being kidnapped and beaten in 1998, and James Byrd, Jr., an African American who was dragged to death in Texas that same year.

The Thompson case was the result of an investigation by the Office of Inspector General at the Department of Homeland Security ("DHS OIG"). It was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Ann M. Anaya and Trial Attorney Nicole Lee Ndumele of the Civil Rights Division.

Late this afternoon, Armando Lopez, Special Agent in Charge of DHS OIG, recognized both attorneys for prosecuting this case, which was the first time anyone in the nation has been charged under the federal Shepard-Byrd Act. While making his remarks, Lopez said, "This prosecution underscores the commitment of the Department of Homeland Security to protect the Civil Rights of all individuals who interact with our employees, whether on duty or off duty. The Office of Inspector General will continue to aggressively investigate any allegation regarding DHS employees who inflict pain and suffering upon vulnerable victims due to their race, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation."