October 23rd, 2014

To Director Rives Collins, Grace Overbeke, Joel Solari, and the Cast and Crew of The Laramie Project and The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later at Northwestern University:

I would like to thank you for taking on the task of producing the Laramie Project plays, as well as hosting the inaugural installation of the "Not Alone: The Power of Response" exhibit. It's been more than 16 since my son Matthew was murdered in an anti-gay hate crime in Laramie, Wyoming. Matt wanted simply to finish his studies so he could go out and do good things in the world. His death because of violence rooted in hate and ignorance has set me on a journey I would never have imagined for myself before that tragedy. Continuing to educate people about the issues is part of that journey.

The Laramie Project and The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later with their powerful messages, unfortunately, continue to be relevant in the world today. Bullying, hate crimes, young people committing suicide because they are harassed and targeted for being who they are; all of these events surround us on a daily basis and remind us that there is much work to be done.

Dennis and I believe the Laramie Project plays are invaluable educational pieces about how hate impacts society, and we support and thank those who choose to engage in what can be an emotional and sometimes controversial process. Each individual company that produces these pieces brings a fresh perspective to the issues and more minds and voices to the discussion. Sometimes I hear detractors of The Laramie Project refer to it as "that gay play". It is not a play about being gay, or about encouraging anyone to be gay. It's about being targeted, hurt, murdered for being different or perceived to be different, whatever that difference may be, and how those actions affect your life and the lives of all around you. Your continued passion for these plays and this message is very moving.

Again, I thank you for having the courage to engage in a production that can raise so many emotional and personal issues, and for using this opportunity to engage in discussions of how to create a more civil, compassionate, and just world. We applaud and appreciate your efforts.

Best wishes,

Judy Shepard, Co-Founder and President, The Matthew Shepard Foundation