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Local group holds protest march for dead man

by Rick Lawes
Staff Writer

About 60 members of the Bangor Area Gay, Lesbian, Straight Coalition held a protest march Monday night protesting the "lenient and irresponsible" prosecution of three juveniles involved in the killings of a Bangor homosexual in July.

The juveniles, Shawn Mabry, 16, James Bevins, 17 and Daniel Ness, 15, all of Bangor, pleaded guilty to manslaughter in 3rd District Court in Bangor Monday afternoon in the killing of Charles Howard.

The march went from the courthouse to the State Street bridge where the three youths allegedly threw Howard into the Kenduskeag Stream on the night of July 7.

The protestors, wearing lavender arm-bands and ribbons as they have throughout the pre-trial hearings in the case, held a quiet demonstration in front of the courthouse, before marching to the bridge where they threw carnations into the water.

A member of the coalition said lavender was Howard's favorite color, and carnations were his favorite flowers.

Marching in a large circle in front of the courthouse, members of the coalition carried placards reading "We are everywhere. We won't go away, Justice may fail, memories will not," and "A plea for justice, not bargains!"

As they marched, the protestors sang "We are gentle, angry people, We are gay and straight together, We are friends of Charlie Howard, We are justice seeking people, we are singing for our lives." Anne Phibbs, a member of the coalition,

made a statement she said expressed the views of the entire coalition.

She said, "We are shocked and outraged at the lenient and irresponsible prosecution of the Charlie Howard homicide. To allow the three individuals to be treated as juveniles instead of adults and to plea bargain from murder to manslaughter lessens the severity of the crime and may fail to act as a deterrent. The taking of an individual's life,

for any reason, is a most serious and irresponsible offense.

"The Bangor Area Gay, Lesbian, Straight Coalition and many other concerned citizens of Maine hope that justice will prevail, at least in the sentencing process.

"It is not our desire to seek revenge. While the purpose of sentencing a murderer to prison for 25 years is ques-

tionable, it is the current standard of punishment used in this state. By applying a different standard to these three criminals, a precedent is being set and a clear message is being sent to them and their peers that the killing of a gay man is less of a crime. It further implies that this community will tolerate crimes against those who are different.

"To fashion a sentence to fit this crime is not an easy matter given the limited options left available through the current judicial system. . . . Several years sentence without parole in the Maine Youth Center and mandatory counseling for these three individuals to deal with their homophobic attitudes would be appropriate. This would ensure punishment as well as rehabilitation."

Other members of the coalition spoke out after the statement was made. One member, Deb Leavitt, said "I think that in the media, in the newspapers, it is the gay community that is outraged and that's all. It's not only the gay community, it's the straight community too. We have straight members in the coalition as well as gays."

Another, Mrs. Lorena Hart, said "He (Howard) shouldn't die like that. Those boys didn't have no right to do that to him. Those boys should not get away with it."

As the protestors marched to the site of the killing, they continued their singing. When they reached the bridge, they threw the carnations into the water, some marchers yelling "We won't forget" and "We'll never forget." They then began to chant "Never again, never again" as the carnations floated downstream.

After a moment of silence, the protestors sang "We Shall Overcome," as they broke up.