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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### STATEWIDE GAY RIGHTS GROUP ANNOUNCES 2011 FREEDOM AWARD RECIPIENT

**CHICAGO** - Equality Illinois, the state's largest organization advocating for full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, has announced the recipient of the 2011 Freedom Award.

The Freedom Award is given annually to individuals or organizations who demonstrate remarkable vision, courage, and leadership in the effort to achieve full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender ("LGBT") people in Illinois. This year, Equality Illinois recognized **Illinois Safe Schools Alliance** with the Freedom Award for the Alliance's steadfast and relentless work on behalf of LGBT and questioning youth in Illinois.

"One of Illinois Safe Schools Alliance's most remarkable successes is empowering young LGBT people to lead the safe schools movement. They have created a statewide network of strong activists who are directly impacted by this work." – said **Bernard Cherkasov, CEO** of Equality Illinois. "We are proud to have partnered with them and looks forward to many future successes of the Alliance."

The mission of the Alliance is mission is to promote safety, support and healthy development for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth, in Illinois schools and communities, through advocacy, education, youth organizing and research. The Alliance works towards its mission by empowering young people to lead in the safe schools movement, by educating the public on school violence issues, and by actively advocating for inclusive policies. The Alliance was a critical leader of broad coalition pushing for passage of anti-bullying legislation in Springfield. The **Safe Schools Act** was passed by near-unanimous bipartisan support, and was signed into law by Governor Pat Quinn on June 27, 2011.

"We are honored to count Illinois Safe Schools Alliance amongst our strongest partners," – said **Jeremy Gottschalk, Board President** of Equality Illinois. "They have committed their strength, passion, and articulate voices to the mission of full equality for LGBT people, and their involvement inspired others to join in."

Background information on the 2011 Freedom Award recipient is available on Equality Illinois' website, [www.eqil.org](http://www.eqil.org).

The 2011 Freedom Award will be presented at the annual black-tie Justice for All Gala, which is scheduled to take place on Saturday, February 12, 2011 at the Hilton Chicago. Tickets are available at [www.eqil.org](http://www.eqil.org) and (773) 477-7173.

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Equality Illinois was founded to secure, protect and defend the civil rights of lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender Illinoisans. It is one of the Midwest's largest gay civil rights organizations.