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Gay Rights Advocate James Dale to Speak at IWU

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Gay Rights Advocate James Dale to Speak at Illinois Wesleyan University

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Gay rights advocate James Dale will be a guest speaker on Tuesday, Oct. 14, at 7 p.m. at the Illinois Wesleyan University Hansen Student Center, 300 Beecher St., Bloomington. The program is sponsored by Student Senate and is free and open to the public.

Dale's speech will address his lawsuit against the Boy Scouts of America (BSA), expansion and social marketing of gay media, civil rights, pop culture, politics, HIV prevention, his personal experiences growing up and personal empowerment, and the current debate over gay marriages. "I will frame the speech from my personal experience with the Supreme Court and the awakening of responses to the treatment of homosexuals after the decision," said Dale.

After being in the BSA for 12 years, in 1990 at age 20, Dale was expelled from the organization based upon his homosexuality. He was a student at Rutgers University in New Jersey. The expulsion prompted Dale to take the BSA to court.

In 1995, Dale lost the case even though New Jersey now had a nondiscrimination law that included gays. Not discouraged, he continued to pursue the case with Lambda Legal Defense, a group that defends gays and lesbians who do not receive equal treatment.

On March 2, 1998, a New Jersey appellate court overturned the first court ruling by stating that "there is absolutely no evidence before us...supporting a conclusion that a gay scoutmaster, solely because he is homosexual, does not possess the strength of character necessary to properly care for or impart BSA humanitarian ideals to the young boys in his charge."

In August 1999, the case then went to the New Jersey Supreme Court, who held that the BSA, a federally chartered corporation with five million members, is a public accommodation and not clearly private, and thus cannot legally discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. Their landmark decision unanimously ruled that anti-gay discrimination is a violation of state law.

The BSA appealed the case to the United States Supreme Court in *Boy Scouts of America v. Dale*, and in June 2000 the court gave a 5-4 decision that the Boy Scouts had the right to expel gay youth and leaders. Even though the case lost at this level, it did succeed in drawing attention to the issue of gay rights.

"Of course it was disappointing to lose the case," said Dale. "But what has happened in the aftermath has made me very hopeful. Time is on the side of equality." Since the Supreme Court ruling, many organizations and individuals have disassociated themselves from the Boy Scouts of America to show support for gay and lesbian rights.

Dale now works full-time as the vice president of a health care publishing company in New York City in addition to speaking engagements and volunteering with civil rights organizations and other activities.

For additional information concerning Dale's speech at Illinois Wesleyan, contact the Student Senate Student Welfare and Human Relations Commissioner Kevin Klean, at (309) 556-1370.