

Give the People Light and they will find their own way.



The Wisconsin Light

**HAPPY NEW YEAR
A PROSPEROUS 1998
TO ALL**

Same - Sex Couples Gain Adoption Rights in N.J.

National Gay & Lesbian Task Force Releases State by State Survey of Equal Rights Fight

Washington, DC—The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) has released its annual survey of state legislation. Capital Gains and Losses: A State by State Review of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and HIV/AIDS Related Legislation in 1997 is a telling picture of the prominence of states in the national struggle occurring over the rights of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) people.

Since the Task Force began tracking activity in state legislatures in 1995, the number of GLBT related measures has increased each year. The intensity of these activities also remains high.

"1997 was an unequivocal step forward on our march to justice," stated Kerry Lobel, Task Force executive director. "We've long known that the states and local communities are not only the barometer for the state of Gay, Lesbian, bisexual, and transgender rights in America; they are the eye of the storm," added Lobel.

New Hampshire and Maine's passage of comprehensive civil rights laws for Gays, Lesbians, and bisexuals, Washington State's statewide ballot initiative to ban employment discrimination based on sexual orientation - the first such measure ever in the country - were some of the year's highlights.

(Washington's initiative was defeated, and Maine's law will be put to a vote on February 10th.)

Also, the passage in 1997 of major domestic partnership initiatives in the state of Hawaii and the cities of San Francisco and Chicago, coupled with a record number of favorable domestic partner bills introduced, reflects the growing importance of family issues in the GLBT community.

The continued push forward for the freedom to marry during the past year was also a critical component in the effort for full recognition of GLBT families.

In the meantime, the right wing's rallying around a homophobic state adoption worker in Texas is indicative of the attacks on GLBT families that occurred in state legislatures in 1997 and foretells a likely increase in such attacks during the 1998 state legislative session.

1997 Summary Findings

The Task Force Tracked 248 pieces of legislation (compared with 160 in 1996):

- * 128 pieces of legislation classified as favorable appeared in 38 states (compared with 61 in 25 states in 1996).

- * 120 pieces of legislation classified as unfavorable appeared in 44 states (compared with 99 in 40 states in 1996).

- * When marriage bills are removed, the figures show 124 favorable measures and 74 unfavorable measures (compared with 56 and 50, respectively, in 1996).

- * The 46 anti-marriage bills represented 38% of the unfavorable bills introduced, and 53% of all the unfavorable that were passed into law.

- * HIV/AIDS measures represented the largest percentage (23%) of the favorable measures introduced as well as passed (38%).

- * Civil rights measures represented the second largest percentage of favorable bills introduced (20%) and 8% of the favorable bills passed.

For a copy of Capital Gains and Losses: A State by State Review of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and HIV/AIDS Related Legislation in 1997, or for contact information of statewide political organizations, contact NGLTF's media director at (202) 332-6483 ext. 3314.



Thanks CCF - Members of the Saturday Soft Ball League were on hand to present Cream City Foundation Chair, Tony Rhodes with an award thanking CCF of its support of the SSBL. Shown above back row (L-R) are Tom Rowland, Mike Vukovich, Tony Rhodes, and Bob Melig. Front row, Tom Salzsieder and Dan Nelson. CCF gave the SSBL a \$1,500 grant to help fund the Milwaukee Classic and Midwest Invitational Softball Tournaments.

Civil Rights Stakes Will be Highest Ever for Lesbians and Gay Men in 1998

New York—Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund (Lambda) said on December 30, that the new year will see a record number of Lesbian, Gay and AIDS-related concerns in the country's highest courts.

In 1998, among more than 50 cases on its docket, Lambda anticipates a ruling from Hawaii's highest court that may make civil marriage available to same-sex couples for the first time in this country. State by state, Lambda also is fighting child custody and adoption rulings that discriminate against same-sex families. In one such case, North Carolina's highest court is expected to rule on whether Fred Smith, who is Gay, can have his two sons returned to his care, since his ex-wife won custody because of his sexual orientation.

In the US Supreme Court this spring, Lambda is coordinating "amicus" briefs challenging a Maine dentist's refusal to treat a woman with asymptomatic HIV. The case, "Bragdon v. Abbott, brought by the Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders, could determine whether the Americans with Disabilities Act covers hundreds of thousands of people who are infected with HIV, but show no sign of illness.

Also on Lambda's Supreme Court docket is a case on behalf of an Atlanta lawyer, who was fired from the Georgia State Attorney General's office because she is a Lesbian and had a private, religious wedding ceremony. Lambda and the ACLU are co-counsel for the lawyer, Robin Shahar.

Lambda awaits a Supreme Court ruling

Gay Group Praises Coors Brewing Co., But Calls for Continuing Boycott of Coors Beer

West Hollywood—In the third week in December, with a crowd of nearly 100 in attendance, the Stonewall Democratic Club held a community forum at the Metropolitan Community Church to discuss the issues surrounding Coors Brewing Company, the Coors family's support for right wing extremist causes and the 20 year-old boycott of Coors products by the Lesbian and Gay community.

At the conclusion of the community forum, Stonewall's Coors Advisory Task Force presented a resolution to its membership, simultaneously praising Coors for their strides in creating a positive and non-discriminatory environment for its Lesbian and Gay employees and calling on the community to refrain from purchasing Coors products until such time as the Coors family, its businesses, and foundations, cease funding or providing leadership to organizations whose mission includes the denial of fair and equitable

treatment of Lesbians, Gays, and other minorities.

In another employment-related case, "Oncale v. Sundowner Offshore Services, Inc.," for which it authored an "amicus" brief joined by the leading women's organizations as well as Gay and other civil rights groups. In this same-sex sexual harassment case, heard by the Court December 3, Lambda urges that the federal law against sexual harassment at work be applied without regard to the sex or sexual orientation of the harasser or victim.

Another challenge to the widespread problem of anti-Gay employment discrimination is one of the first cases to test California's protections for Lesbian and Gay workers. Argument against California Casualty Management's firing of salesman Dan Kovatch is expected before a state court of appeals in the spring.

In the only active federal appeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," Lambda with the ACLU, has just filed its brief in "Able v. USA. A district-level court rejected the policy as unconstitutional in July; the US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit is expected to hear the government's appeal early in 1998.

In a renegade decision last fall, a three judge federal panel disregarded the Supreme Court's ruling against Colorado's Amendment 2 and upheld Cincinnati's nearly identical Issue 3, which would prohibit legislators from approving discrimination protections for Lesbians, Gay men and Bisexuals. Determined to put an end to the country's last remaining anti-Gay ballot initiative, Lambda and co-counsel have appealed for a hearing by the entire Sixth Circuit Court.

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In September, Stonewall President Eric Bauman appointed a seven member task force to evaluate the ongoing controversy surrounding Coors. The task force spent two months reviewing of over one thousand documents, including news articles, SEC, FEC and IRS reports, analysis by progressive and Gay groups and a variety of other documents.

The task force interviewed a wide assortment of community activists, political activists, reporters, watchdog groups (such as People for the American Way), union officials and both line and management employees of Coors Brewing Co..

The Task Force analyzed the political contributions of Coors family-owned companies and foundations, and of Coors

Newark, NJ—Gay and unmarried couples in New Jersey have won the right to jointly adopt children in a settlement hailed by Gay rights advocates as the first in the nation to put such couples on equal footing with married people.

While the settlement applies only to children under the state's custody, activists said it will streamline the adoption process for Gay and unmarried couples and provide permanent homes to more children now in foster care.

"The settlement guarantees that all couples seeking adoptions will be judged only by their ability to love and support a child," said Lenora M. Lapidus, legal director of the state chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union.

The settlement was flayed by conservatives.

"I think it's a sad commentary," said Republican state Assemblywoman Marion Crecco, sponsor of a bill banning same-sex marriage that has not yet made it to the Assembly floor.

"I think every child deserves to grow up with a mother and father. It's a very natural thing," she said.

Robert Knight, director of cultural studies for the Family Research Council, a Washington think tank, called the settlement "a victory for homosexual activism and a defeat for children already bruised in life and in need of an intact, committed husband-and-wife family."

The agreement by New Jersey authorities came in a class-action lawsuit brought in June by Gay and lesbian families with the assistance of the ACLU.

In about half the states, including New Jersey, each individual in a Gay or unmarried relationship could adopt a child, but the "second-parent" adoption required an additional petition, taking more time and money.

Florida and New Hampshire bar adoptions by Gays and Lesbians. The rest allow individual adoption by Gays and have not been tested for second-parent adoptions by a Gay partner, Adams said.

Under the settlement, the New Jersey must scrap its policy barring joint adoption of its wards by Gay or unmarried couples.

It may deny consent to them only by applying the same standards it applies to married couples, including "considerations such as the stability of the prospective adoptive couple's relationship," the settlement said.

In addition, it allows any Gay or unmarried couple who believe they are denied joint adoption based on marital status or sexual orientation to ask a state judge to enforce the decree and award them legal fees.

Wendi Patella, a spokeswoman for the state Division of Youth and Family Services, said the agency now has custody of about 100 children who are eligible for adoption. In 1996, 687 children in the division's care were adopted, she said.

Kate Kendall, executive director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights in San Francisco, estimated there are 8 million to 13 million children being raised by Gay or Lesbian parents in the United States.

A
Decade of
Light

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