MLGPA News (April 1997)

Betsy Smith

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/mlgpa_news

Part of the American Politics Commons, American Studies Commons, and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
http://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/mlgpa_news/6
The Battle to Pass LD 1116 Begins

Twenty years ago, in 1977, the first anti-discrimination bill was introduced to the Maine Legislature. It was defeated. Since then the bill has been introduced, and defeated, almost every legislative session. Once (1993) it passed both the House and Senate, only to be vetoed by Governor McKernan. And once (1995) it was not introduced, due to the divisive referendum campaign the state had just been through with “No on 1.”

We are now at a milestone. The anti-discrimination bill, titled LD 1116 – An Act to Prevent Discrimination, is being introduced to the Legislature for the 10th time. If it passes, we will be the 10th state in the country to have a law of this caliber. However, we do not yet have the votes required for passage.

We urgently need your help. Your time and effort right now could make a difference in the course of history. Your effort today may pave the way for a better tomorrow for thousands of GLBT individuals in Maine.

We need you to write a letter to your state representative and senator. Encourage them to support LD 1116. Explain why this bill is important and offer personal experience if you can. Explain why preventing discrimination based on sexual orientation is right, fair, and just, and a concept whose time has come.

If you can do more, please write to the Joint Standing Judiciary Committee, listed to the right. The Judiciary Committee will hear testimony from both sides of the issue on Tuesday, April 8, at the Public Hearing for LD 1116, and will make a recommendation to the full Legislature within a week or so. It is vital that the Judiciary Committee recommends an “ought to pass” to the full Legislature. Our letters of encouragement will help in that process. Please do what you can.

The squeaky wheel gets the grease – Write your Legislators!
A word from the president...

February and March were busy, productive, and fruitful for MLGPA. Despite passage of anti-gay legislation around the marriage issue, the sentiment of the Legislature was not tragic. Granted, the 118th Legislature voted nearly two-to-one to support a same-gender marriage ban, but many legislators sent an encouraging message. Some felt that a referendum would be divisive, painful, and costly, and they were not willing to put the gay community through that.

We now turn our attention to the proactive effort to prevent discrimination based on sexual orientation. The Public Hearing for LD 1116, An Act to Prevent Discrimination, will be Tuesday, April 8, 1:30pm, at the Augusta Civic Center. We ask that you make every attempt to attend this hearing — this is our best chance ever of passing the bill, and we need everyone’s help to succeed. Please arrive early, if you can.

Behind the political front, we are working hard to financially support our efforts. Passing a statewide anti-discrimination bill, only the 10th of its kind in the country, requires valuable time and resources. We look to you, our members and supporters, to help us in this process. Without your help, we cannot maintain the level of professionalism required for this type of work. Please consider renewing your membership at a higher level than last year.

Thank you for your loyal support over the years. We truly could not do our work without your help, and we greatly appreciate your contributions. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or suggestions.

Respectfully,

Betsy Smith

An Important Note to Our Members...

Until 1994, the MLGPA mailing list was strictly confidential. Under that policy, only Board members could affix labels, and our mailing list was never exchanged with like-organizations, regardless of the purpose. As we moved into the mid-90’s, it became common to work in coalition with other progressive organizations, and list exchanges became a necessary part of growth.

The then-Board of Directors chose to explore the possibility of changing the confidentiality policy. They alerted the membership of the change and offered to keep anyone confidential who so chose. They also rewrote the MLGPA membership brochure to include a check off for confidentiality. A small percentage of people still remain confidential.

The Board revisited the issue of confidentiality this year. We want to remain an organization whose list is not confidential, which means we would consider a case-by-case list exchange with a like organization, if there were a beneficial reason to do so. (We would by no means “sell” the list to a mail house or anything of that type). But we want anyone who wants to remain confidential to be able to do so. Confidentiality means your name will not be given to any other organization, and if a legislative candidate asks for a list in his/her district, only a Board member will affix the label.

This action does not change the current policy in any way. We simply wanted to remind you of your option to be confidential. If you want your name to be confidential, it is important that you let us know. Please contact us at MLGPA, PO Box 252, Hallowell, ME 04347 or call at 1-800-55MLGPA. Thank you for your attention to this matter.
Same-Gender Marriage Ban:  
The Final Count

Last week Maine’s Legislature, by a nearly two-to-one margin, passed the same-gender marriage ban into law. This legislation, the result of a citizen-initiated referendum mounted by Carolyn Cosby’s Concerned Maine Families, made a preemptive strike against gay marriages which may – in the future – be legal in other states, from ever being recognized in Maine. At a March 12 Public Hearing at the Augusta Civic Center on LD 1017, “An Act to Protect Traditional Marriage and Prohibit Same Sex Marriages,” CMF forces argued that “gay and lesbian couples would instantly become members of a protected class under the ‘marital status’ category of the Maine Human Rights Act.”

Opponents of the bill, including many leaders in Maine’s religious communities and the MCLU, countered that the civil rights of lesbian and gay couples are denied the protections of more than 1,049 Federal laws that protect heterosexual marriages including housing and employment, taxation, death and disability benefits, to name just a few categories. Marvin Ellison, Professor of Christian Ethics at Bangor Theological Seminary, stated in his remarks to the Judiciary Committee, “Society benefits from stable, committed marriages and from strong family ties ... providing [gay and lesbian] couples the same benefits that mixed-gender couples already enjoy will strengthen American families.”

MLGPA believes the Legislature’s clear message to our community is that this bill – as hateful as it is – would have been far more divisive, painful and costly had it been voted down and sent out to referendum.

Major Donor Matches Your New or Renewed MLGPA Membership!

Recognizing how vital MLGPA’s work is to the GLBT communities in Maine, an anonymous major donor has offered to match new and renewed memberships on a dollar-for-dollar basis up to $20,000! That means your gift to MLGPA is now worth twice as much!

MLGPA offers a variety of membership categories:

- Friend ............................................. $25
- Advocate ........................................ $50
- Coalition Builder ......................... $100
- Champion of the Cause ............... $250
- Legislative Leader .................. $500

MLGPA’s costs are enormous. It is costing over $30,000 just to pass the anti-discrimination bill – and this doesn’t include any of our other political or educational activities. If you’re not a member, or if your membership has lapsed, please send us your check today. Your contribution really makes a difference! It enables us to continue our goal of securing civil rights for the GLBT communities as well as our other vital work. Thank you!!

Contributions and memberships should be sent to: MLGPA, PO Box 232, Hallowell, ME 04347.▼

Maine Community Foundation Announces Available Grant Money

The GLBT communities received good news this past month when the Maine Community Foundation announced an exciting financial opportunity through the Maine Equity Fund. The Maine Equity Fund will distribute $60,000 to organizations who are working to better the lives of GLBT individuals.

MLGPA, along with many other organizations, are drafting and developing proposals for projects designed to help the GLBT communities. Projects will be funded on the basis of how they coincide with a needs assessment conducted last year by the Maine Equity Fund. Based on the scope of the projects, this fall should bring with it some exciting changes and opportunities for the GLBT individuals in this state.▼
Events and Meetings in Our Community

Kate Clinton Coming to Town!!

MLGPA is excited to be a co-sponsor of the Kate Clinton concert in June. Kate is coming to South Portland as part of Symposium XXIII, performing on Friday, June 13, at Southern Maine Technical College. The show is being produced by Above and Beyond, an up and coming business endeavor based out of Portland. Above and Beyond brought us the near sold-out and hilarious show of Suzanne Westenhoefer on March 2. Together, the three groups (MLGPA, Symposium XXIII, and Above and Beyond) plan to bring you an unforgettable evening. It’s not too early to order your tickets. Call 773-6974 for tickets and information.

Symposium XXIII

For the 23rd year, Symposium hails again. A weekend retreat for GLBT individuals, Symposium XXIII offers workshops, events, networking, recreation, entertainment, and good food. Keynote speaker this year is Urvashi Vaid, former director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and human rights activist. Special entertainment by renowned lesbian comedian Kate Clinton. Symposium XXIII will be held June 13-15, in South Portland. For information and tickets for Symposium XXIII, please call 625-8499.

MLGPA Calendar of Events

- April 8 – Citizen Lobby Day for LD 1116, gather at 8am at UU Church in Augusta, proceed to State House from 8:30-12:00
- April 8 – Public Hearing for LD 1116 (Anti-Discrimination Bill), 1:30pm, Augusta Civic Center
- April 24 – Monthly MLGPA Board meeting, open to all, 6-9pm, MEA, Augusta
- May 4 – Maine AIDS Walk. Groups are organizing local Walks around the state.
- May 15 – Monthly MLGPA Board meeting, open to all, 6-9pm, MEA, Augusta
- June 13, 14, 15 – Symposium XXIII, Southern Maine Technical College, South Portland
- June 13 – Kate Clinton in concert, 8:00pm, at Symposium XXIII, South Portland
- June 19 – Monthly MLGPA Board meeting, open to all, 6-9pm, MEA, Augusta

If you have social, educational or political events to organize in your area, please call us. We can help!

Volunteers Needed

Volunteers are always needed at MLGPA. We have mailings to do, letters to write, events to plan and attend, programs to implement, committees to sit on, meetings to attend, coalitions to build, etc. etc.

If you would like to volunteer, please contact us:
- call us at: 1-800-55-MLGPA or 761-3732 in Portland
- e-mail us at: tcoffinme@juno.com
- write us at: PO Box 232
  Hallowell, ME 04347