

MLGPA News

Fighting for Fairness Since 1984

P.O. Box 232, Hallowell, ME 04347-0232

June 1997

L.D. 1116 Faces People's Veto Attempt

On Friday, June 13, 1997, Michael Heath, Executive Director of Maine's Christian Civic League, announced his organization's plans to prevent L.D. 1116, "An Act to Prevent Discrimination," from becoming law. Heath vows to marshal the forces of 1,000 volunteers in a statewide signature drive that—if successful—will put the law out to referendum in a process called the "people's veto." Recognizing the challenge of gathering so many signatures in an off-election year, Heath stated the Christian Civic League will review its progress by July 3 and make a decision on whether to continue the signature drive.

The previous weekend, June 7, at the MLGPA Victory Celebration at the Augusta Civic Center, organizers announced that Betsy Sweet, long time political activist, had agreed to lead the fight to protect L.D. 1116. In remarks made to the hundreds of celebrants, Sweet called for a vision of Maine's future "after the bill" when resources on both sides of the divisive issue could focus on solving "the real problems." Sweet was referring to Governor Angus King's comments, at the bill's signing, that Maine's enemies are "poverty, disease, and ignorance ... not gay people."

If the Christian Civic League gathers 51,000+ valid signatures by the beginning of September, the initiative

will be put to referendum as early as November. The question will ask voters whether they want to repeal (or prevent from becoming law) L.D. 1116, the law that adds sexual orientation to the list of individuals in the Maine Human Rights Act who are protected from discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations and credit.

If the Christian Civic League succeeds in gathering enough signatures, we will once again need to ask everyone to join in the statewide fight to protect our civil rights. We will implement a leaner version of Maine Won't Discriminate. We will not have time to resurrect the entire MWD grassroots campaign, but we invite and encourage all former MWD'ers to join in the effort in whatever way possible. And of course, we strongly encourage the participation of every new individual as well.

MLGPA will be one of the leading organizational forces of this campaign, which means as a member your support will contribute to the likely defeat of the people's veto. Your additional support, whether monetary or personal, will help in kicking off this campaign.

We will keep you informed of the progress as we wind our way through the summer months.

MLGPA Seeks Contributions for Co-op Office

MLGPA has its office in the Peace and Justice Center of Southern Maine, located at 1 Pleasant Street in Portland. The PJC is a cooperative of many organizations whose missions align with the continuing goal of peace and justice. Some of the organizations are: Peace Action Maine, Veterans for Peace, MaineShare, Food Security Council, Foreign Affairs Council, Maine Lesbian/Gay Political Alliance and Physicians for Social Responsibility, among others.

We each pay rent to the PJC for use of office space. In addition to our personal office space, we have two common meeting areas (one large, one small), a copy machine, a fax machine, a kitchen area, and a central bathroom. The set-up provides us with a phone bank venue as

well, given that we have use of all phones if necessary.

Though each organization is responsible for its own share of rent (based on ability to pay), the Peace and Justice Center needs to raise additional funds for the use of the common areas and machines and its own programs. We would like to ask MLGPA members to consider contributing to the Peace and Justice Center.

If you would like more information on the PJC, please feel free to call us (1-800-55-MLGPA or 761-3732), or call Beryl at Peace Action Maine (772-0680) and request information. If you'd like to contribute (any amount would be greatly appreciated), you may send it to: Peace and Justice Center of Southern Maine, 1 Pleasant Street, Portland, ME. 04101.

MLGPA

**Fighting for Fairness
Since 1984**

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A word from the president...

I am so happy that June is finally here. Not just because June is the beginning of summer (which I'm thrilled about!), but also because June represents a time when things calm down for a moment. The last few months have felt like a tempest, both in their intensity and excitement.

Think back for a moment to the beginning of 1997. First we were faced with Carolyn Cosby and her anti-gay marriage bill. Between lobbying, educating, and re-educating (some people forget that marriage is a basic civil right granted to citizens of this country!), the storm was a challenging one. We eventually lost the vote in the legislature, resulting in a ban on same-gender marriages—a loss we will someday address.

At the same time, we were prepping (for the 10th time) for the anti-discrimination bill; choosing sponsors, plotting strategy, creating work teams, and outreaching to individuals across the state. The first major events of the campaign were the Lobbying Day and Public Hearing, both held on April 8. Then came the Senate debate and vote on May 7, and finally the historic House debate and vote on May 8, just two days after New Hampshire passed their anti-discrimination bill. With barely a moment to catch our breaths, we were sitting at the momentous signing of the bill by Governor King on May 16.

In the meantime, MLGPA was planning for a benefit with comedienne extraordinaire Kate Clinton on June 13. But before we could enjoy the evening with Kate, we threw a celebration party for the entire state of Maine, in honor of the 20-year effort to pass the anti-discrimination bill. On June 7, at the Augusta Civic Center, history was revealed and treasured, as we celebrated our hard earned victory. (But rest not long, for the Christian Civic League is about to make us defend our lawful rights).

Southern Maine Pride is now upon us, and MLGPA will march proudly under its banner. We have plenty of reason to be proud; we now live in a state that declared to the nation that gay, lesbian, and bisexual people are entitled to the same civil protections that non-gay people have enjoyed for a lifetime.

Celebrate, enjoy, be proud, relax...and then rejuvenate. For though one road has ended, another has surely just begun.

Betsy Smith
President, MLGPA

MLGPA Mourns Death of Board Member

On Wednesday, May 21, 1997, MLGPA Board Member Jim Schneider was killed in an automobile accident in New Hampshire. The news came as a shock to the Board, who had met just days before the accident and had praised Jim for his work in Viatical Settlements.

Jim was elected to the Board in September and was working on the Membership Committee. Some of you may remember him behind the membership table at the banquet in February. He had recently written a proposal for increasing membership via the GayNet. His enthusiasm for this type of work will be sorely missed by all.

A memorial service is being held for Jim on Saturday, June 28, at 2:00pm at the Unitarian Universalist Church at 69 Winthrop St. in Augusta. If you get this notice in time, we encourage you to attend the service, especially if you knew Jim. His family would deeply appreciate knowing how important a role Jim had in the gay community.

Same-Gender Domestic Violence

by Angela Thompson, MLGPA Intern

It is a myth that domestic violence only happens in heterosexual relationships. In fact, the incidence rate in relationships for lesbian/gay abuse and heterosexual abuse is approximately the same—25% to 30% of relationships are abusive.

As in heterosexual abuse, lesbian and gay abuse is defined as the use, or threat to use, physical, sexual, or verbal behavior to coerce the partner to do something one wants; to degrade or humiliate; to gain a sense of power or control; to act out one's anger inappropriately. Abusive behaviors may be subtle or life threatening, but they create an atmosphere of intimidation. This leaves the person who is abused isolated, afraid, and usually convinced that she/he is at fault. Domestic violence is about the misuse of power, not about co-dependent behavior or victim responsibility.

Although there are many similarities between gay/lesbian and heterosexual domestic violence, there are some important differences. Lesbians and gay men have more difficulty finding and utilizing appropriate and supportive services than heterosexuals. Using available services such as the legal system or women's shelters often

means "coming out," which can be a major life decision. Some abuse survivors know few, if any, other gay men or lesbians, so leaving the abuser could mean complete isolation from gay or lesbian people. Gay and lesbian communities are sometimes small, so if the survivor was part of a community, chances are that everyone she/he knew would soon learn of the abuse.

Domestic violence is never easy to contend with. It is not limited to any age, race, religion, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, class, education level, or physical or mental ability. It happens in rural and urban areas in every state of the US. It happens all over the world.

If you, or someone you care about, is being abused, please know that you don't have to go through this alone. There is help available. Under the leadership of the Maine Coalition for Family Crisis Services, domestic violence projects throughout the state have been involved in recent diversity workshops. Staff and volunteers of these projects have been trained to deal with the unique and sensitive issues that victims of same-gender domestic violence may face. You have the right to seek help. No one deserves to be abused.

Services for Victims of Domestic Violence

Maine Coalition for Family Crisis Services
Statewide office
128 Main Street
Bangor, ME 04401
941-1194

Caring Unlimited (York)
PO Box 590
Sanford, ME 04073
324-1802

Family Crisis Shelter
(Cumberland, Sagadahoc)
PO Box 704
Portland, ME 04104
1-800-537-6066 or 874-1973

The Next Step (Hancock)
PO Box 1465
Ellsworth, ME 04605
1-800-315-5579 or 667-4606

New Hope for Women
(Knox, Lincoln, Waldo)
PO Box 642
Rockland, ME 04841
1-800-522-3304 or 594-2128

Family Violence Project
(Kennebec, Somerset)
PO Box 304
Augusta, ME 04330
1-800-498-1930 or 623-3569

Womancare (Piscataquis)
PO Box 192
Dover-Foxcroft, ME 04426
564-8165

Abused Women's Advocacy Project
(Oxford, Androscoggin,
Franklin)
PO Box 713
Auburn, ME 04210
1-800-559-2927 or 795-4020

Womankind (Washington)
PO Box 493
Machias, ME 04654
1-800-432-7303 or 255-4785

Battered Women's Project (Aroostook)
421 Main Street Suite 2
Presque Isle, ME 04769
1-800-439-2323

Special Events Report

What a Celebration!!!

A big Thank You to those of you who attended MLGPA's LD 1116 bash on June 7 in Augusta! We had a wonderful time—what a nice mix of history, appreciation, and celebration! A special thanks goes to Lisa Vacarro who donated her excellent DJ services for the evening. For those of you who could not attend, Karen Geraghty (MLGPA immediate past president and lobbyist for L.D. 1116) organized a fabulous group of speakers including State Treasurer Dale McCormick, Harry Gordon, Senator Joel Abromson, Betsy Sweet and nearly every past president of the MLGPA since its founding in 1984. MLGPA's President Betsy Smith and Vice President Del Wilson did a great job of emceeing the program, which also included footage from Channel 8's television coverage of the signing of L.D. 1116 by Governor King. MLGPA's coalition partners' and other supportive organizations' banners were hung around the banquet room, as well as a written history of the 20 years leading up to L.D. 1116's passage. We'd also like to thank those of you who came early to help set up.

Boston Pride Success

Several MLGPA'ers trekked down to Boston on June 7 to represent LGBT Mainers in Boston's Pride parade. The group left Portland early Saturday morning, marched behind New Hampshire in the parade, and scooted back up to Augusta in time for the big party. What troopers!

Volunteer Night Held in Portland

Tom Coffin, Julie Rothrock, and Betsy Smith held a meeting for MLGPA volunteers who are interested in "getting beyond mailings" on June 3 at the MLGPA office in Portland. Chuck Davis, Jen Goldman, Nancy Lyons, and Paul Prescott came to learn more about MLGPA's mission and organization and to discuss volunteer opportunities throughout the summer. Any of you who would like to receive this information, and who would like to become a volunteer on a more active, engaged level, are encouraged to contact Tom or Julie at their respective email addresses: ShadowBoxT@aol.com or jarothrock@juno.com.

Kate Clinton and Bob Smith Rule!

The Kate Clinton/Bob Smith performance at Symposium last Friday, June 13, was quite the gig! The Hub at Southern Maine Technical College in South Portland was packed with people, and what a Gala Night of Comedy it was! The Volunteer/Special Events Committee would like to thank Kate McLaughlin, Paul Prescott, and the Outright folks who helped prepare for the show.

Don't forget Bangor Pride!

MLGPA will be gathering a group of folks to march in Bangor's Pride parade on July 12. For more information, contact Tom or Julie by e-mail at ShadowBoxT@aol.com or jarothrock@juno.com.

MLGPA Calendar

July 10-13 — National Gay & Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) Federation meeting. Knoxville, Tennessee. Excellent conference for Legislative information. For information call Tracey Conaty at 202-332-6483 ext. 3303.

July 12 — Bangor Pride. Parade starts at 11am. Festival from 12-3pm. For information call 942-7681.

July 13-19 — Gay, Lesbian, Straight Teachers Network (GLSTN) Summer Leadership Institute. For information call John Spear at 212-727-0135

July 19 — Cape Cod (Mass.) Gay Pride. For information call 508-564-4535 or 508-790-8782.

July 26 — MLGPA Summer Board Retreat. 10:00-4:00. Location TBA. Everyone welcome. For information call MLGPA office at 1-800-55-MLGPA or 761-3732.

July 31-Aug. 3 — Gay & Lesbian Victory Foundation Training Institute. Boston, MA. Excellent training for campaigns. For information call Dave Fleisher at 718-230-9865.

August 16-18 — Gay Times Bar Harbor, a GLBT weekend retreat of workshops, speakers, and entertainment. College of the Atlantic, Bar Harbor. For information call 244-4062.

August — No MLGPA monthly meeting this month. We're taking the month off!

