

MLGPA News

Fighting for Fairness Since 1984

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

February 1997

Same-Gender Marriage

MLGPA Insight

The Maine Lesbian/Gay Political Alliance is committed to upholding the civil rights of Maine families. We respect the values that make every family's foundation strong and healthy: love, honesty, commitment, compassion, the promise of building a future together. Same-gender couples who share these values exchange more than emotional vows; they form a bond of financial and legal interdependence.

Like all couples who make joint decisions about where they live, the property they own, how they care for each other in times of sickness and provide for each other in case of death, gay and lesbian people expect the same provisions provided under law accorded to heterosexual couples. Marriage is a contract—regardless of whether it is between a man and a woman, or between two women, or two men.

Key Points:

- ▼ Same-gender couples are already prohibited from contracting civil marriage in Maine.
- ▼ Without the legal right to marry, same-gender couples do not have rights like family health coverage, medical and bereavement leave, child custody, tax benefits and pension plans.
- ▼ Tradition can't justify discrimination. Not long ago, marriage was limited to members of the same race and religion, and married women were virtually the property of their husbands.
- ▼ Civil and religious marriage are two separate institutions. Civil marriage binds a couple in a legal contract consisting of obligations and benefits. While some religions provide ceremonial services for same-gender couples, these unions do not receive legal recognition.
- ▼ Legalizing same-gender civil marriages will not require any religion to perform or recognize these marriages.

What you can do:

- ▼ Phone your legislator. In the House call 1-800-423-2900. In the Senate call 1-800-423-6900. Leave

a message for your legislator and encourage him/her to vote NO on the initiated bill, LD 1017. We need you to do this ASAP, as the vote is coming soon!

- ▼ Call the Governor at 287-3531 and encourage him to oppose LD 1017!
- ▼ Write your legislator
- ▼ Tell your story... long-time couples (15+ years), call us!!
- ▼ Volunteer your time. To volunteer or for more information, contact us at:

MLGPA
PO Box 232
Hallowell, ME 04347
1-800-556-5472 or 761-3732 in Portland

Cosby's Same-Gender Marriage Attack

In the summer and fall of 1996, Carolyn Cosby and Concerned Maine Families collected enough signatures to bring a citizen initiated bill to the legislature. Her bill intends to ban same-gender marriage in Maine, as well as to ban the recognition of same-gender marriages performed in other states. At the moment, there is no state in the nation where same-gender marriages are legal. However, Hawaii is considering such an action and has, in fact, opened the doors for the legalization of same-gender marriages. Due to the process of democracy, the final word on this matter will not be known for some time.

If Hawaii does indeed legalize same-gender marriage, the Constitution of the United States claims that all states must recognize marriages performed in any other state in the nation. There is nothing in the Constitution that precludes gay/lesbian marriages from this constitutional right.

As you can figure, Concerned Maine Families' intent is to act before the Hawaii decision is rendered. Their bill is called:

An Act to Protect Traditional Marriage
and Prohibit Same-Sex Marriages

The following are some excerpts from that bill:

...the union of one man and one woman joined in traditional monogamous marriage is of inestimable value to society; the state has a compelling interest in the support of harmonious families and the physical and mental health of children; and, that the state has the compelling interest in promoting the moral values inherent in traditional monogamous marriage...

...to nurture, sustain and protect the traditional monogamous family unit in Maine society, its moral imperatives, its economic function, and its unique contribution to the rearing of healthy children...

...persons of the same sex shall not be permitted to contract marriage...

...any marriage performed in another state would violate... this Act if performed in this state will not be recognized in this state and will be considered void if the parties take up residence in this state.

For a complete copy of this bill, please call MLGPA, request a copy, and leave your name and address. MLGPA... 1-800-556-5472 (or 761-3732 in greater Portland).

A word from the president...

MLGPA is operating at full force in order to pass the anti-discrimination bill, once and for all. But although we are devoting significant resources to this effort, it cannot be accomplished without your help!

Please contact your legislator. Ask him or her to support the bill, LD 1116, which is entitled An Act To Prevent Discrimination. We will also need your help at the public hearing, which is tentatively scheduled for March or April. We need people to testify about job or housing discrimination that they have experienced. We will also hold a citizen lobby day, when citizens come to the State House to meet their legislators. This is an ideal time for citizens to encourage their legislators to support the bill. Please call us at 1-800-556-5472 (or 761-3732) for information and further notification.

Also on the legislative agenda is our lobbying effort against Concerned Maine Families' anti-gay marriage bill. We view same-gender marriage as a basic civil right and we will lobby against any attempt to deny us our basic civil rights. Again, please help us by calling your legislator (numbers under separate article) NOW and urge him or her to OPPOSE LD 1017, An Act to Protect Traditional Marriage and Prohibit Same-Sex Marriages. Information and an update on the public hearing for the anti-gay marriage bill can be obtained by calling MLGPA.

The Maine Lesbian/Gay Political Alliance is working hard to protect gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans-

gendered individuals from discrimination. Members of the MLGPA Board and others who support us work tireless hours in fighting for justice. We have operated for years on a shoestring budget, and have finally made the commitment to restructure and professionalize our organization.

Many of you often don't see MLGPA functioning within your community. That is about to change. Community outreach and communication will be a priority in our new structure. Representing the gay community in hate crimes and safer schools will be another, as will building coalitions in order to stay prepared for in-state or out-of-state attacks by the radical right. Supporting progressive state candidates has always been, and will continue to be, a priority.

This, of course, comes at a price. MLGPA is in the midst of a fund raising campaign, in order for us to continue the work we do on your behalf. When you receive a letter from us, please give as generously as possible, so the work may continue, and some day we may all live free from discrimination and harm.

Respectfully,

Betsy Smith, President, MLGPA

MLGPA Hosts Evening of Awards and Celebration

The MLGPA 12th Annual Awards Banquet was held Saturday, February 8, at the Augusta Civic Center. Attendance was almost 300 and the evening was enjoyed by all. Most notable were the awards presented to individuals who have contributed significantly to our community.

The Cameron Duncan Award

(Outstanding AIDS Community Service)

presented to Peter Haffenreffer of Portland

Peter Haffenreffer is a founding member and the president of the Board of Directors of the Peabody House in Portland. The Peabody House is a residential house for AIDS patients in the advanced stages. Without Peter's vision, contributions, and leadership over the last several years, Peabody House may never have become a reality.

The F.E. Pentlarge Award

(Outstanding Demonstration of Family Values)

presented to Peter Rees of Ellsworth

Peter Rees has advocated for gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered rights for many years, in many different arenas. He was co-chair of the Hancock County Maine Won't Discriminate chapter in 1995, he was co-chair of the Decline to Sign project of MLGPA in 1996, and he is a founding member the

fledgling Downeast Chapter of the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Teachers Network (GLSTN). As a non-gay member of the community, Peter's actions demonstrate what family values are really all about.

The Media Award

presented to Maine Public Radio for
Maine Things Considered

Maine Things Considered was awarded for their fair and balanced reporting of issues important to the g/l/b/t community. Hardly a story went by that they did not cover fairly and consistently, with respect and dignity, much more than any other radio or TV news network.

Community Service Award

presented to Laura Fortman,
Director of the Maine Women's Lobby

According to Laura's presenter at the banquet, Laura Fortman is a bridge. A bridge is a solid structure, under which there are swamps, dangerous waters, and untrekkable territory. Laura serves as that solid structure in our community, being the means by which we are able to pass over untrekkable territory. Laura Fortman is a tireless leader and advocate for women, g/l/b/t, and people of disadvantaged status. She is one of the most effective lobbyists in Augusta and the gay community owes a tremendous amount of gratitude to her leadership and companionship.

Community Service Award

presented to Southern Maine Pride Committee

Michael Rossetti and Laurie Fortman (not to be confused with Laura Fortman) stepped forward to receive the community service award on behalf of the Southern Maine Pride Committee. Southern Maine Pride has grown tremendously in the last several years, thanks to the tireless hours of volunteerism by the Pride Committee. All one has to do is come to Portland in June to witness the largest weekend-long gay event in the state. Their work is truly worthy of community service.

Community Service Award

presented to Paula Stockholm,
founder of Maine GayNet

Paula Stockholm is solely responsible for bringing Maine GayNet to the gay community of this state. Paula (found at Paula@maine.com) has opened an avenue of communication that never existed in the history of the Maine gay community. People in rural Maine are now able to keep abreast of information and events happening across the state. Our organizations now have an additional forum by which to communicate their most important information. Thank you Paula!

LD 1116: An Act To Prevent Discrimination

This bill will finally make it illegal to discriminate against people in Maine based solely on their sexual orientation. It says that you cannot be fired from a job, evicted from an apartment, denied a loan, or turned away from a restaurant or hotel if you are, or someone just thinks you are gay, lesbian, or bisexual. This bill will provide the same protections that already exist on the bases of age, sex, race, marital status, disability, religion and national origin under the Maine Human Rights Act. Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, and Rhode Island have already outlawed this kind of discrimination.

Maine still has discrimination!

In a recent Maine survey, ninety-four percent of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals responding have been victims of some form of discrimination. Hate-crime statistics prove that the incidence of anti-gay beatings and harassment is rising throughout the state. Some victims are afraid to press charges when it means they could be fired or evicted just for coming forward.

Special remedies, not special rights

Some people think it's their right to discriminate against lesbians, gays and bisexuals. Remember—this kind of prejudice is still legal in the State of Maine. All across this country the religious right is battling to impose its fundamentalist doctrine on lawmakers and citizens alike. These same extremists have opposed almost every civil rights effort in the past. Now they want us all to believe that these basic human rights we seek are special.

Religious freedom will be maintained

This bill specifically says that all religious organizations are guaranteed the right to practice their faith according to their beliefs.

What you can do to help:

- ▼ Write your legislator, express your support for LD 1116: An Act to Prevent Discrimination.
- ▼ Phone your legislator
- ▼ Volunteer your time (we have a constituent lobby day and a public hearing on the bill coming soon)
- ▼ Call MLGPA, leave your name, address, and phone number, and we'll call you soon with information about when, where, and how we need your time and effort.

1-800-556-5472 or 761-3732 in Portland

Events/Meetings/Etc.

GAY, LESBIAN, STRAIGHT TEACHERS NETWORK (GLSTN)

GLSTN-Southern Maine meets the second Monday of each month, 6:30-8:30pm, at the Waynflete School in Portland. Join us for programs, speakers, resource sharing, and conversation. To be included on the mailing list (you'll receive minutes, notice of meetings and events, directions to meeting, etc.), please leave your name and address by calling 773-9547, or by writing to us at GLSTN-Southern Maine, PO Box 10334, Portland, ME 04104, or by e-mailing to: smittybj@aol.com.

GLSTN-Downeast Chapter will hold an organizational meeting on Sunday, March 2, from 1 to 4pm at the Downeast AIDS Network, 114 State Street in Ellsworth. Whether you are gay or straight, teacher, parent or other interested person, you are welcome. The purpose of the group will be to make our schools safer and friendlier for sexual minority students and teachers. Involve yourself in this important work. For more information, please call Peter Rees at 667-2358.

LESBIAN COMEDY AT ITS BEST!!! IT'S SUZANNE WESTENHOEFER

Never before has a gay or lesbian entertainer of this caliber come to Portland. But she's coming... March 2, 7pm, at the State Street Church in Portland.

Suzanne Westenhoefer is one of the world's most visible and popular openly gay comedienne. The first lesbian to ever have her own HBO television special (for which she was nominated for the coveted ACE cable award), Suzanne's breakthrough TV appearances include Comedy Central's *Politically Incorrect*, *Ricki Lake*, *The Joan Rivers Show*, *Geraldo*, *Evening at the Improv*, and *Caroline's Comedy Hour*.

Suzanne was an emcee for the 1993 March on Washington for Lesbian/Gay and Bisexual Rights, appeared as part of President Bill Clinton's inaugural celebration and hosted the closing Ceremony of the 1994 Gay Games at New York's Yankee Stadium. Her first comedy recording, *Nothing In My Closet But My Clothes* was released in January on the Uproar Label.

Showtime is 7:00pm. A post-show reception with Suzanne at Katahdin Restaurant will benefit the Lesbian Health Project of Southern Maine. For tickets and information, call Above and Beyond at 207-773-6974 or e-mail to ABToday@aol.com. Tickets are \$16.50 for general admission, \$20.00 for limited preferred seating, and \$35.00 for VIP tickets which include the post-concert reception.

SYMPOSIUM XXIII... COMING TO PORTLAND THIS SUMMER!!!

It's their 23rd year, and they just get better and better each year. SYMPOSIUM is an annual weekend retreat for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered community. This year's SYMPOSIUM will be held on the beautiful campus of the Southern Maine Technical College in South Portland, where you'll find access to beaches, kayaking, sailing, and other summer treats.

SYMPOSIUM offers workshops, events, networking, recreation, entertainment, and good food. This year's theme is "Community." In addition to the workshops and valuable information you'll walk away with, there is a very special evening planned for Saturday, June 14. This event is open to everyone, regardless of whether you are attending SYMPOSIUM. This year's main attraction will be **Kate Clinton**, nationally known lesbian comedian. Joining forces with her for a workshop of two will be **Urvashi Vaid**, nationally known civil rights advocate and author.

You will not want to miss SYMPOSIUM or Kate Clinton or Urvashi Vaid. This Dynamic Duo is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. All this is happening on:

June 13, 14, and 15, 1997
with **Kate Clinton** performing on
Saturday, June 14

For tickets to Kate Clinton, call 773-6974. For more information about SYMPOSIUM—and an application to attend, call 625-8499. The Committee needs early reservations to assist them in forming and realizing plans for the Event.

MLGPA CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- March 2 — Suzanne Westenhoefer show, 7pm, State Street Church, Portland
- March (date TBA) — Public Hearing on Anti-Gay Marriage Bill, Augusta Civic Center
- March 23 — Monthly MLGPA Board meeting, open to all, 6-9pm, MEA, Augusta
- March (date TBA) — Citizen Lobby Day, Augusta
- April (date TBA) — Public Hearing on the Anti-Discrimination Bill, Augusta Civic Center
- April 24 — Monthly MLGPA Board meeting, open to all, 6-9pm, MEA, Augusta
- 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 14 — Kate Clinton show, at Symposium XXIII, South Portland
- June 19 — Monthly MLGPA Board meeting, open to all, 6-9pm, MEA, Augusta