

# MLGPA News

Politics, Education, Outreach

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

January 1999

## Discussion on Civil Rights Continues

On December 5, at the fourth statewide meeting on civil rights, discussion centered around two specific issues: potential wording of a legislative bill and possible structures for a civil rights coalition.

MLGPA presented a 20-year history of the legislative bill—a history that began in 1977. The original bill was titled An Act to Include the Term “Sexual or Affectional Preference” in the Maine Human Rights Act. The motion failed in both the House and Senate, but prior to the vote over 100 LGBT advocates attended a public hearing for the bill. Only one individual, Jasper Wyman of the Maine Christian Civic League, testified against the bill.

In 1983 the bill received its first affirmative vote in the Senate—18 yes, 12 no, with 1 not voting. It was in 1983 that the Judiciary Committee proposed changing the wording from “Sexual or Affectional Preference” to “Sexual Orientation.” The bill received its second affirmative vote in the Senate in 1985, but was unable to maintain its support in 1987. In 1989 the wording was changed again to An Act to End Discrimination, and it received its first affirmative House vote—71 yes, 69 no, with 11 not voting.

It was in 1993 that both the House and the Senate passed the bill—LD 246, An Act to End Discrimination. After defeating seven attempts to amend the bill, the House voted 72–60 in favor of the bill, with 19 not voting. The Senate voted 21 yes, 14 no. Governor McKernan vetoed the bill and the Senate failed to gain the necessary support to overturn the veto.

In 1995 the bill was submitted, but then later pulled, by Sen. Dale McCormick due to the statewide anti-gay referendum initiated by Carolyn Cosby and Concerned Maine Families. The referendum was defeated 54–46%. The bill was introduced again in 1997 as An Act to Prevent Discrimination, where it was passed by both the House and Senate and signed into law by Governor Angus King. The rest, as they say, is history—the bill was repealed on February 10, 1998, in a “people’s veto” referendum.

In November’s statewide civil rights meeting, the majority of participants voted to support a civil rights bill in the Legislature. While Legislators actually write the language of the bill, they gather information from LGBT advocates. In December’s civil rights meeting, discussion about language of the bill revolved around whether to address, in the statement of fact (a summary of the bill), the issues of special rights, affirmative action and/or job quotas.

One reason raised for addressing these issues is that some legislators might be more apt to support the bill, in spite of the people’s veto, if they know the bill does not grant “special rights.” Many expressed the belief that the issue of special rights has never been publicly addressed when the radical right has used it against us. Others felt that by addressing these issues we run the risk of giving them a legitimacy they do not merit.

MLGPA’s Legislative Committee will continue to work on wording for the bill. The committee meetings are

open to everyone and we encourage full participation. The committee meets the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of the month, from 6–8pm, at the Maine Education Association on Community Drive in Augusta. (The committee will not meet on Wednesday, December 23 due to the holidays.)

Also, if you are not able to attend a meeting, we would love to know how you feel about the bill. Should we address the issues of special rights, affirmative action and/or job quotas, or should we not? Please jot down your opinion and either mail it to us at PO Box 232, Hallowell, ME 04347 or e-mail it to us at <MLGPA@javanet.com>

**The Next Statewide Civil Rights Meeting is Saturday, January 23, 1–4pm, at the UU Church (120 Park Street) in Bangor. Snow Date is Sunday, January 24, Same Time, Same Place.** At that meeting we will discuss further potential structures for a statewide civil rights coalition. The participation of all interested individuals is absolutely essential. Please spread the word!

### Remember,

all MLGPA members are welcome to attend Board Meetings and Committee Meetings. Call MLGPA for times and places.places.



# MLGPA

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Outreach

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*Vice President*

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## Honorary Board Members:

Rich Couch

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# 'Equality Begins at Home' Begins Planning

Equality Begins At Home (EBAH), the nationally coordinated but locally organized series of events to take place March 21-27, 1999, is up and running in Maine. The first meeting was held on December 15 and suggestions were made for political events in Augusta, rural events in various counties, and a general assembly/forum for pro-LGBT organizations. At this early stage, we especially encourage everyone's participation to gather as many ideas as possible. We will

determine later what is feasible and what is not.

The next meeting of the EBAH planning committee is Thursday, January 14, at the Peace and Justice Center in Portland, 1 Pleasant St. 2nd floor, 7-9pm. Everyone is welcome! For those too far away to attend, we encourage your ideas and we will work to meet in a more central location if there is interest. Home, in the title, means all over the state and not just southern Maine.

## MLGPA to Hire Lobbyist

MLGPA will be hiring a part-time lobbyist for the 1999 Legislative session. We fully expect a civil rights bill to be introduced and there may be anti-gay legislation as well. We seek someone with experience—preferably with non-profit

lobbying. The position will run from January to June. Salary is negotiable. Please spread the word if you know of anyone interested in this position. Resumes should be sent to Betsy Smith, 5B Heritage Lane, Freeport, ME 04032.

## Save the Date!!

## MLGPA Annual Banquet Saturday, March 6

MLGPA celebrates its 15th year of service to the LGBT community. Please join us at our Annual Banquet on Saturday, March 6, in Augusta, as we honor individuals for their service and dedication to the LGBT community over the past 15 years.

Included in this newsletter you will find a nomination form. Please make plenty of copies and use them to nominate individuals whom you feel should be recognized for their achievements. Feel free to share the form with others. It is invaluable to us to gather information from our members and the community. The address and deadline for nominations is on the form itself.