

# THE LESBIAN/GAY RIGHTS LOBBY OF TEXAS

## LGRL Announces Legislative Agenda

The Lesbian/Gay Rights Lobby has identified its legislative agenda for the 75th Legislative Session. LGRL will focus on passing legislation that will help end hate-related violence and discrimination that is based on sexual orientation. Health issues like AIDS and HIV will also remain top priorities. Along with attempting to pass

legislation, we will have to stop several bills designed to harm lesbian and gay Texans. One issue Texans will face will be attempts to pass legislation prohibiting the recognition of same sex marriages (see Texas and Marriage article). The 75th Legislative Session will begin on January 14, 1997.

## 10,000 Texans Take the Pledge

The Lesbian/Gay Rights Lobby of Texas is continuing to work to end hate-related violence and our Pledge Project is getting more Texans involved in this effort to end hate crimes.

By signing the Pledge, Texans make a commitment to do what they can to stop hate crimes. So far, nearly 10,000 Texans have taken the Pledge. Our goal is to have 50,000 pledges signed by the next legislative session in 1997. We hope to present the signed Pledges to Governor Bush. These pledges represent the number of Texans who no longer tolerate hate-related violence in our state. Dianne Hardy-Garcia, executive director of LGRL, said "the best way to get the attention of our elected officials is to show our strength in numbers. The Pledge Project is designed to get a bigger cross-section of gay and non-gay Texans involved in the effort to end hate-related violence."

"The recent burning of black churches in East Texas reminds us that we must continue to stand up against hate crimes. The Pledge provides a way for people to take action against hate crimes. Texans can use The Pledge to educate and sway their neighbors, families, friends and co-workers to help support laws that address this useless violence and bigotry," Hardy-Garcia said.

Several broad-based, statewide organizations have already endorsed the Pledge Project, including the NAACP, AFL-CIO, the Texas Council on Family Violence and Texas Faiths United. Response to the Pledge Project has been very positive, with 50,000 cards already distributed throughout the state.

### *Lesbian/Gay Rights Lobby of Texas Legislative Agenda for the 75th Session of the Texas Legislature 1996-1997*

#### Hate Crimes

Strong, clear and enforceable hate crime laws that will increase penalties for hate crimes.

Civil penalty for hate crimes

Increased funding for police training (TCLOSE)

#### Gay Marriage

Prevent the needless passage of additional laws restricting equal marriage rights

#### Texas Employment Non-Discrimination Act (TXENDA)

Protect Texans from discrimination that is based on sexual orientation in employment

#### Transgender Issues

Protect Texans from discrimination that is based on gender identity in employment

Support the ability of people to have gender reassigned on Texas Drivers Licenses

#### Non-Discrimination in Education

Protect Texans from discrimination that is based on sexual orientation in public schools, colleges and universities

#### AIDS and HIV

Increase funding for AIDS and HIV services, medication and prevention efforts

Insure the privacy protections of people affected by HIV and people seeking HIV testing

#### Initiative and Referendum

Prevent Texas from becoming a state which allows an initiative and referendum process

## Texas Pride Weekend A Success!

Thousands of people attended the first annual Texas Pride Weekend held June 1-2. Visitors from all over the state traveled to Austin to participate in what will become an annual state-wide event for LGRL, featuring a day-long festival, dance and march. "We marched, we danced and we celebrated how far we have come as a gay and lesbian community in Texas," said Pride Coordinator Renee Villeneuve. "We had people from Victoria to Amarillo attending the Pride Festival. The Pride Festival had two stages of live music and more than 100 community and artisan booths from all over the state. Everyone seemed to have a great time and we're already looking forward to next year!" Texas Pride Weekend is scheduled for May 31-June 1, 1997.



Bill and Sandra Hogan lobbying for the Texas Hate Crime Bill at the Texas Capitol.  
Photo by R.K. Florence.

## Note from the Executive Director Thanks to Our Families and P-FLAG

Dear LGRL Supporters,

When I think about the work we are doing at LGRL, I believe the greatest thing that has happened in the last few years has been the involvement of our families in our movement. In the last two years I have been moved by the commitment of people who have gay children, siblings and friends who have stood up to anti-gay discrimination in such powerful ways.

Houston P-FLAG sponsored an incredible cross-country bus trip to bring attention to the need to prohibit discrimination in employment that is based on sexual orientation. After losing their children to hate and violence, the Hogan family, the Saldana family, the Broussard family and the Burzinski family fought with us as we tried to get our lawmakers to do something about discrimination and violence. In recent years, four of our LGRL board members have come from P-FLAG. These board members are Ann Chapman, Gail Rickey, Renee Buck and Kathy Massey. Their commitment to ending discrimination has

given me much-needed hope and inspiration. All year long, I have been amazed to find out that so many of our volunteers are the straight siblings of or friends of gay people.

Personally, during the last few months my own family has taken a stand on my behalf. I'll never forget my brother marching with us to the Capitol. My parents took The Pledge and their pledge card is hanging on my office wall.

I hope in the upcoming year our families continue to take center stage. Their commitment to justice makes our quest for equality more possible and more personal. I now believe that what really matters is not always just the passing of laws, but the changing of minds. To me, our families joining in our struggle means that people can change and that makes all things possible.

Sincerely,

Dianne Hardy-Garcia  
Executive Director

## Hate Crime Resolutions at State Conventions

All across Texas, lesbians and gays attended their precinct conventions to urge the passage of a resolution asking law makers to take a strong stand against hate crimes. The resolution passed in both Republican and Democratic precincts from Amarillo to San Antonio and went on to pass at several county conventions. The resolution even passed at the Brazoria County Republican Convention. At the Texas Democratic Convention, our hate crime resolution passed overwhelmingly. Although our resolution did not pass at the Republican State Convention, we should be proud of the many activists who worked to bring attention to hate crimes. The Log Cabin Republicans of Texas worked diligently to pass hate crime resolutions on the precinct level.

## Equity PAC Sponsors Statewide Voter Registration Drive

The upcoming November elections are crucial to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities of Texas. In an effort to have a maximum voter turn-out, the Equity PAC will sponsor several voter registration drives all over Texas. The Equity PAC is the political action committee associated with the Lesbian/Gay Rights Lobby of Texas. We will be doing registration in many different cities and settings during the months of August and September. If you would like to be involved with this effort or if you know of any locations where a voter registration drive might be successful, let us know.

## Justice Prevails Amendment 2 Decision

The U. S. Supreme Court gave a huge boost to the gay and lesbian civil rights movement on May 20 when it struck down Colorado's Amendment 2, which sought to deny basic human rights on the basis of sexual orientation. The Court's 6-3 ruling was also encouraging for litigants in the domestic partnership lawsuit filed against the City of Austin over Proposition 22. That ballot initiative, passed by city voters in 1994, took away health benefits from the domestic partners of city employees. Colorado's Amendment 2 began as a statewide ballot initiative. "Austin is still living with the scars of a similar anti-gay ballot initiative," said Dianne Hardy-Garcia, executive director of LGRL. "A smaller group's civil rights should not be subject to a majority vote."

## Texas and Same-Sex Marriage

On July 13, the U.S. Congress passed the "Defense of Marriage Act" which creates a federal definition of marriage and gives states the right to not recognize same-sex marriage performed in other states.

The federal definition of marriage specifies that a marriage must be between one woman and one man. This definition will prevent same-sex couples from claiming federal benefits like Social Security, veteran's or other benefits even in the event of a partner's death.

Besides defining marriage, the Defense of Marriage Act also allows states to decide whether they will recognize same-sex marriages. This virtually assures that this type of anti-marriage legislation will be introduced in states all over the United States.

In Texas, State Representative Kip Averitt of Waco has stated that he will introduce legislation in the 75th Legislative Session that will bar recognition of same-sex marriages performed in other states. Currently, Texas law already specifies that a marriage is between one woman and one man. In response to the right-wing extremist agenda, Texas will now have to face this fight. Clearly, right-wing groups have decided that gays and lesbians should be their political scapegoat during this volatile election year.

Thus far, 15 states have anti-gay marriage laws. Thirty-six states have faced or are facing attempts to pass anti-gay marriage laws. With Congress' passage of the DOMA, we know how tough our fight in Texas will be. We will all need to be involved in the effort to stop the passage of Rep. Averitt's needless discriminatory bill.

## The Calkin Fund Researches Discrimination in Education

The Calkin Fund is sponsoring a new project that will pull together research and information about the discrimination faced by lesbian and gay youth in education. Recent studies have indicated that 30% of lesbian and gay students drop out of school. Youth that drop-out face additional economic and social problems in the future.

The Calkin Fund hopes to educate Texas' lawmakers and the public about the discrimination faced by lesbian and gay youth as they try to get an education. This Calkin Fund effort will pull together young people, volunteers and educators from all over Texas to help research and develop informational materials on this topic.

Our next meeting of the Non-Discrimination in Education Project will be in Austin:

**Date:** September 28th  
**Time:** 12pm to 3pm  
**Place:** The Cornerstone  
(12th and Red River)

The Cornerstone is Austin's new lesbian and gay community center.

## Legislative Matching Project Needs You

The Legislative Matching Project attempts to match a LGRL volunteer with each of Texas's state legislators. Our volunteers help lobby their individual legislators while organizing others within their district. Our volunteers organize district-wide calling campaigns and letter-writing campaigns. During the 74th Legislative Session, more than 200 volunteers participated in this project. We hope to double that number in the next year. If you would be willing to help with this effort, please mail the enclosed volunteer form to our office.

### LGRL's New Address

LGRL of Texas  
P.O. Box 2340  
Austin, Texas 78768  
512-474-5475

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN TEXAS!

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