

## HMO pays \$250,000 in AIDS redlining case

National Gay Rights Advocates (NGRA), the San Francisco District Attorney's Office, and the California Department of Corporations announced on November 16, that a health maintenance organization (HMO) agreed to pay \$250,000 to the city of San Francisco to settle a major AIDS-related redlining dispute.

Employees of HealthAmerica approached NGRA in the spring of 1986 with evidence that the HMO was secretly rejecting all San Francisco residents in an effort to avoid AIDS-related medical expenses. In November, 1986, NGRA filed formal complaints with the San Francisco District Attorney's office and the California Department of Corporations which worked with NGRA to investigate the case.

HealthAmerica has agreed to settle the case by paying \$125,000 to the city of San Francisco and by providing an additional \$125,000 in direct medical care for needy San Franciscans, many of them people with AIDS. HealthAmerica is also enjoined from rejecting applicants for arbitrary reasons, including sexual orientation, and from denying access to its programs on the basis of sexual orientation or HIV infection.

"Our success in this case sends a strong message to HMO's and insurance companies across the country. The health care industry cannot avoid the costs of AIDS through scapegoating and stereotyping. The lesson of this case is a simple one — when panic and prejudice become the basis for corporate AIDS

policy, the policy-makers will eventually pay the price," said Benjamin Schatz, Director of NGRA's AIDS Civil Rights Project.

"The implications of this case extend far beyond San Francisco," NGRA Executive Director Jean O'Leary commented. "If insurance companies and health plans are able to exclude entire social groups, more Americans will have to rely upon Medicaid, Medicare, and public hospitals if they become ill. In the long run, the taxpayers will be forced to pick up the bill."

NGRA's Schatz expressed his appreciation for the work of Arlo Smith and David Moon of the San Francisco District Attorney's office and Vera Kawamura of the California Department of Corporations. Schatz also praised former HealthAmerica employee Joanna Baugh for having the courage to bring the case to NGRA's attention. According to Baugh, company supervisors had told her to take all San Francisco applications and hide them in a desk drawer. These applicants were then sent rejection letters indicating that they had been turned down for medical reasons.

— National Gay Rights Advocates

## Killer pleads guilty in anti-lesbian shooting

On October 27, Adams County, Pennsylvania Judge Oscar Spicer convicted Stephen Roy Carr of first degree murder in a shooting that killed Rebecca Wight and critically wounded her lover, Claudia Brenner. In a move praised by Brenner, the gay community, and victim advocates, the judge also excluded as inadmissible, any arguments by the defense

that the victims' sexual orientation and behavior provoked the attack.

Brenner and Wight were on a hiking trip in Adams County, Pennsylvania when, on May 13, they twice encountered defendant, Stephen Roy Carr, along their route. After making camp in a secluded area by a stream, the women were suddenly fired upon by Carr, who had been hiding nearby. Wight, who was shot in the back and the head, died at the campsite. Although shot five times, Brenner managed to walk nearly four miles to a road where she was able to get help.

Carr waived his right to a jury trial in exchange for an agreement by the prosecution not to seek the death penalty and to drop several lesser charges. Although he has not yet been sentenced, Carr faces life imprisonment without parole. An appeal by Carr's defense attorney is expected.

Commenting on the sentence, Brenner stated that "a life sentence with no parole in a maximum security prison, while not compensating for our tremendous loss and pain, is the appropriate response to a nightmare that nothing can ever make right."

Brenner also praised the handling of the case by the local prosecutor and police, describing them as "respectful and professional . . . All those involved never wavered in the investigation and prosecution of the crime. Most gay people who are victims of violence do not receive the kind of treatment that I received."

Brenner also called for greater visibility as a means of countering anti-gay violence.

"The only really helpful position we can take is to be open about our lives and share our loves and losses with all people we come in contact with," she said.

— National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

## Lesbians share stories of loss

Lynne D'Orsay thought she had prepared herself for the worst when she came out to her parents as a lesbian. But she never expected the business memo which said to her, "Family connection terminated. No further contact desired."

D'Orsay, disowned more than two years ago by her entire family, is now seeking submissions for an anthology of stories, *Severed Ties: Lesbians Losing Friends, Losing Family*.

"Lesbians have a unique perspective on the loss of relationships," says D'Orsay. "The severance may be permanent or temporary, or a woman may fear such a loss will occur if she tells the truth about her life."

Many women, according to D'Orsay, suffer serious financial reprisal, emotional, and even physical trauma when they are cut off.

"When we share our stories, we learn that survival and healing from these traumas is possible," says D'Orsay, who has facilitated workshop discussions for disowned lesbians. "Women realize they are not alone. They learn that they have choices. We are always free to choose our own, healthier, families."

Many anthologies are already being made available by women's presses on topics ranging from coming out to incest. *Severed Ties: Lesbians Losing Friends, Losing Families* can add much to this growing wealth of women's literature, while bringing understanding and healing to many individuals.

Lesbians wishing to share their stories or seeking more information should write to: PO Box 332, Portsmouth, NH 03801.

— WimminWrite

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