

# local news

## Washington faces two discriminatory measures

*Lawmakers and activists speak out against two anti-civil-rights measures filed in Washington this month, one sponsored by an offshoot of the OCA*

by Pamela Lyons

The Oregon Citizens Alliance has spread its message across the Columbia River. Many Washington State lawmakers and activists have been taking a strong stand against the OCA's sister organization, the Citizens Alliance of Washington, and two anti-gay-rights measures that are slated for next November's ballot.

"None of us can sit on the sidelines and be silent. For me there is one simple truth — gay and lesbian Americans have tolerated discrimination for too long," said Sen. Patty Murry (D-Wash.) in a written statement read at a Wednesday, Jan. 12, press conference held in Vancouver by Washington Citizens for Fairness.

The press conference was one of eight held around the state the day after CAW filed its measure, titled the "Minority Status and Child Protection Act," with the state.

Another discriminatory measure, titled the "Equal Rights, not Special Rights Act," was also filed with the state on Jan. 11. That measure is sponsored by a Tacoma group, the Washington Committee for Equal Rights, Not Special Rights.

Charlie Brydon, president of Washington Citizens for Fairness, said in a written statement that the campaign against these measures is already organized and going forward.

"Those who will be fighting this radical effort will be one of the largest and broadest political coalitions ever formed in Washington," he said.

"We will keep our state a place where Washingtonians of diverse backgrounds can live and work together with mutual respect."

The statewide board of Washington Citizens for Fairness met in Vancouver on Saturday, Jan. 15, to continue campaign planning and strategizing.

Christina Dodds, a co-chair of the Vancouver branch of Washington Citizens for Fairness, said the campaign against the measures will focus on education and tolerance.

"There will be occasions in which mud will be slung, and we don't want to participate in this," she said. "We intend to run a proactive campaign."

"It is essential that we stand together against discrimination and guarantee that everyone has equal opportunities and rights in the state," said Washington Gov. Mike Lowry in his "State of the State" address on Tuesday, Jan. 11.

While each measure is worded differently, each would have the effect of denying sexual minority populations protection from discrimination, said Diane McDade, a member of Washington Citizens for Fairness.

The act sponsored by CAW denies custodial and adoption rights for sexual minority parents. Gay and lesbian parents who have children in a heterosexual marriage automatically lose their custodial rights upon divorce. If a straight parent is an unqualified parent, children would be placed with the next closest relative or in a foster parent situation instead of living with the gay or lesbian biological parent.

The act also would establish that gender is determined at conception. Medical sex changes would not be recognized.

Same-gender marriages and domestic partnerships, even if recognized in another state, would not be legal in Washington.

The "Equal Rights, Not Special Rights" act doesn't cover custody issues. Like the CAW act, it prohibits schools from "promoting" same-sex orientation and denies spousal benefits for domestic partners in same-sex relationships.

Out of concern that voters will perceive the "Equal Rights, Not Special Rights" act as being less harsh and therefore vote for it as a compromise, the Washington civil-rights group will emphasize that both measures will have the same net effect of discrimination, McDade said.

Sponsors of both measures have until July 8 to gather at least 181,667 signatures to qualify for the November ballot.

Eight Washington State legislators signed a statement denouncing the measures, saying that they are unconstitutional and jeopardize the civil rights of all citizens.

"Let us be spared a bitter, divisive and expensive initiative campaign which will accomplish nothing," said the statement, which was read at the press conference.

The Washington offshoot of the OCA filed its

measure after a leadership change earlier this month. Former CAW head Robert Larimer of Vancouver resigned on Jan. 6 over tactical differences with Lon Mabon, director of the OCA and head of the United States Citizens Alliance, an umbrella organization for state anti-gay groups.

Mabon said he asked Larimer to resign because he was unwilling to take on the confrontational tactics that the OCA favors.

"We are the 82nd Airborne; we are the Marines," Mabon told *The Oregonian* about the leadership change. "We are always looking for the boundary and then pushing it. The people who hit the beaches always suffer the most casualties, but we accept that's our role in the culture war."

Nationwide, similar measures are expected to be on ballots in at least eight states in November, including Idaho, Oregon and possibly Nevada.

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Washington Citizens for Fairness



The Hands Off Washington Project  
P.O. Box 4828  
Seattle, WA 98104