

national briefs

ILLINOIS

An appellate court panel in Chicago has reversed a lower court's ruling and restored liberal visitation rights to a lesbian mother. In a written decision, the court said that a lower court's ruling was flawed and clouded by the judge's "homophobic comments and personal beliefs" when he limited the mother's visitation rights saying that the mother could not be trusted with her son because she is a lesbian. Using frank language in a decision that many believe will be very helpful to gay and lesbian parents throughout the state, the court wrote, "Sexual orientation is not relevant to a parent's visitation rights." The court went on to say that it was relevant only if it directly harms the child.

MARYLAND

The city government of Baltimore has unanimously passed three amendments to the city's administrative manual that extend city employee health benefits to their domestic partners and their dependents. The amendments also allow for family leave and leave of absence benefits to be extended. In doing so, Mayor Kurt Schmoke, responsible for introducing the resolution, fulfilled a promise he made to the gay and lesbian civil right's group, Baltimore Justice Campaign. According to a BJC member, the resolution was passed after a last minute revision that limited those eligible to be covered to only same sex couples who are not allowed to marry by law, therefore limiting the number of workers eligible and the city's financial liabilities. Domestic partners of the city's gay and lesbian workers can enroll in the health plan as of September 1994 with coverage starting January 1995.

MASSACHUSETTS

After a few revisions and a somewhat protracted trip through the Boston City Council's bureaucracy, an ordinance that will allow the city's lesbian, gay and unmarried heterosexual couples to register with the city as domestic partners has been passed. It is expected to be signed into law by Boston Mayor Thomas Menino, a supporter of the measure. The ordinance also establishes a panel that will study the legality and cost of extending health insurance to domestic partners of city employees. It also grants visitation rights to domestic partners at city hospitals and prisons and grants them access to school records.

MINNESOTA

The Minneapolis Public Library Board has voted to extend full domestic partner benefits to its employees. The decision reversed the original health plan package approved a month earlier that denied any benefits for the domestic partners of library employees. The board's ac-

tion puts to rest a long line of cases brought by employees who requested and were subsequently denied domestic partner benefits. In particular, the final decision relied heavily on an out-of-court settlement in the discrimination complaint brought by three librarians embroiled in a battle with the board for six years. Jane Anglin, one of the librarians remarked, "I think what this has taught me is that the Minneapolis human rights ordinance isn't protecting us as well as we think, and that there needs to be a lot of work at the state level."

MISSOURI

Gail Williams, the school superintendent in Lee's Summit, has refused donations of copies of two lesbian and gay-positive books to the school libraries. Project 21, a national group that monitors gay and lesbian issues in school curricula donated the books, *Annie On My Mind* by Nancy Garden and *All-American Boys* by Frank Mosca, to area high schools. In addition, Williams had all existing copies of *Annie* removed from the shelves of the district's school libraries. Williams said, "We felt the book was not being used as a reference or as a resource material in any of our classes."

Opposition to the books originated from library patrons and a local homophobic political group called FIRED UP, members of whom set fire to some copies in front of Kansas City school offices recently.

NORTH CAROLINA

Barney, PBS-TV's purple dinosaur currently popular with preschoolers is being advertised by a minister in Charlotte as a "new age demon" who promotes "homosexuality." Joseph Chambers, a former Church of God minister is publish-

ing a booklet, "Barney the Purple Messiah" to detail the alleged "evil homosexual" conspiracy behind the children's character. According to Chambers, whose homophobic group the Concerned Charlotteans is publishing the booklet, "Barney is teaching kids that we must accept everyone as they are — whether they're homosexuals or lesbians."

WASHINGTON, D.C.

The Supreme Court has rejected an appeal by an 11-year old boy from Illinois who sued the Boy Scouts of America when they excluded him for being an agnostic. The action by the Court thereby lets stand a lower court's ruling that the Boy Scouts of America, unlike restaurants and places of entertainment, is not a public accommodation covered by Title II of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Upon hearing the news, the boy's father Elliott Welsh remarked, "Encouraging a proper moral standard or proper ethical standard is certainly a reasonable thing to do in a youth organization." "But," he added, "the question...is do you make a prejudiced assumption about people's moral and ethical fitness on the basis of whether or not they believe in God."



The Scouts, in an unusual move, asked the Court to review the boy's appeal citing the huge costs in defending its policy from similar attacks in five other states.

Labor Secretary Robert Reich has reportedly said that he would not tolerate discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in his department. He stated that if supplemental agreements with the employee's union were submitted to provide those protections formally, he would sign them. Reich also said that he was not in a position to change the overall federal policy on discrimination but that he would use his influence to promote changes in federal policy to include protections for gay men and lesbians.

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force announced the appointment of activist Betsy Gressler to the newly created position of Organizing Director. Gressler's duties will include supervising NGLTF's organizing activities on health care, campus, workplace and anti-violence organizing and leading NGLTF's effort to assist state and local communities to pass civil

rights legislation. Gressler is a long-time Ohio activist who served as president of Stonewall Cincinnati, was media director on the Equality Cincinnati/No on 3 campaign and founder of OutVoice, Ohio's gay, lesbian and bisexual coalition. Gressler commented on her appointment, "I'm looking forward to working with grassroots organizers across the country to secure legislation that guarantees gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals equal protection from discrimination."

The Human Rights Campaign Fund has announced that Terry Beswick will work on AIDS research issues with Kristine Gebbie, the National AIDS Policy Coordinator for the White House. Beswick has been with HRCF since 1992 and has served as co-chair of the research task force of the National Organizations Responding to AIDS coalition. The HRCF also announced two appointments to its new program, the Federal Advocacy Network. Congressional aide Kris Pratt has been hired as a Public Policy Advocate to work with newly appointed coordinator, Cathy Woolard. FAN is designed to mobilize citizens to lobby its members of Congress, work to elect candidates and to affect the outcome of state and local ballot initiatives.

The Human Rights Campaign Fund has also announced that an ongoing study of post-menopausal nurses, the Nurse's Health Study, will include questions on sexual orientation. Thus, the study will now collect information on the health of lesbian and bisexual nurses. The decision to include the question came as a result of a letter writing campaign organized by a coalition of lesbian and gay health and civil rights groups. "This is a major step in creating a greater base of knowledge on the health of lesbians," said Marci Wasserman, a Public Policy Advocate at HRCF.

WASHINGTON STATE

A Court of Appeals judge has stalled a mother's legal battle to adopt her biological son in order to remove him from foster parents who are gay. A commissioner with the court in Seattle halted the placement of the boy in the mother's home and granted a discretionary review to the state Department of Social and Health Services that is opposed to the adoption bid. The mother, Megan Lucas, who originally gave up the child for adoption, is trying to adopt her son because she waited too long to reverse her decision to relinquish her parental rights after she found out he had been placed with gay foster parents. Lucas says she has nothing against gay men but thinks such a home is not suitable for her son.

Compiled by Lee Norwood



cathartic comics I featuring The Brown Bomber and Diva Touché Flambé by Prof. I.B. Gittendowne

