

# national briefs

## CALIFORNIA

The secretary of the state's office has granted clearance to begin circulation of a proposed 1998 ballot initiative defending "traditional" marriage, reports United Press International.

Proponents need to gather 423,269 valid signatures by Jan. 2 to get the proposal, which would amend California's Family Code to stipulate that only male-female marriage is valid or recognized, on the ballot.

This effort follows the second defeat in the state Legislature of a similar proposal.



The city of Los Angeles has agreed to pay \$325,000 to 28 demonstrators who were beaten by police while protesting Gov. Pete Wilson's veto of gay rights legislation nearly six years ago, United Press International reported Aug. 25.

**ACLU**

Attorneys with the American Civil Liberties Union say police officers beat the protesters, called them

anti-gay epithets and charged them on horseback while they sat and locked hands on the median strip in front of the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles in October 1991.

The city had already agreed to pay \$87,000 to another protester who was beaten on a different night at a different site.

ACLU staff lawyer Taylor Flynn says, "These settlements send a clear and irrefutable message that police in Los Angeles must uphold the right of gay men and lesbians to lawfully protest or pay a hefty price for violating that right."

The demonstrators were protesting the governor's veto of legislation to outlaw housing and employment discrimination based on sexual orientation.



Luis Alfaro, 35, an openly gay artist, playwright and poet who grew up in the Pico-Union area of Los Angeles, was awarded a five-year, \$230,000 MacArthur Fellowship on June 12.

According to the *Washington Blade*, the joint director of the Latino Theater Initiative at the Mark Taper Forum was nominated for the award after a staging of his signature performance piece, *Down/Town*, in Chicago.

Alfaro is also the cofounder of VIVA!, a Los Angeles-based collective of gay and lesbian Latino/a artists; his short film *Chicanismo* appeared on public television and was nominated for an Emmy.

## DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

The head of the nation's largest African American lesbian and gay organization sharply

criticized Alveda King, founder of King for America, for misrepresenting the views of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Keith Boykin, executive director of the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum, accused King for America Aug. 25 of being "willingly manipulated by the white religious right that wants to divide the black community based on sexual orientation."



Keith Boykin

Boykin's remarks followed a series of anti-gay comments made by King during media appearances in mid-August.

She compared gay men and lesbians to "liars, thieves, murderers [and] child molesters" and warned that protecting gay men and lesbians from discrimination would "give a death sentence to civil rights."

She also claimed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. would have opposed gay rights legislation.

"Alveda King is simply trying to cash in on her uncle's name, and she ought to be ashamed of herself for doing so," Boykin said. He also noted that Coretta Scott King, Dr. King's widow, has been very supportive of civil rights for gay men and lesbians.

## FLORIDA

The First District Court of Appeals in Tallahassee has withdrawn its August 1996 ruling upholding a lower court decision that gave convicted murderer John Ward custody of his daughter because the mother, Mary Ward, was a lesbian.

In a one-paragraph order issued Aug. 1, the court dismissed Mary Ward's appeal and vacated its earlier decision, reports The Associated Press.

Trial judges around the state will no longer be bound by the first ruling, in which the court said its decision was based not on Ward's sexual orientation but on the best interests of the child. Mary Ward had requested a second appeal, but she suffered a fatal heart attack before the court acted on her request.

## GEORGIA

A federal appeals court announced Aug. 1 it would not reconsider the case brought by Robin Shahar against Mike Bowers, the former state attorney who is now a Republican candidate for governor.

According to The Associated Press, Shahar argued that Bowers' recent admission of a decade-long adulterous affair while in office was proof he applied a double standard in firing her on the basis that her participation in a lesbian com-

mitment ceremony would undermine the integrity of the state's legal department.

The appeals court ruled 9-3 that Shahar could not introduce new evidence at this stage, suggesting she could have questioned Bowers on the subject during the civil trial six years ago. Both sodomy and adultery continue to be illegal in the state of Georgia.

## ILLINOIS

Chicago's *Sunday Sun-Times* reported Aug. 17 that a six-block stretch of North Halsted Street will receive a \$3.2 million city-financed facelift celebrating the neighborhood's gay and lesbian community.

More than 20 steel pylons to be placed along the street will include a rainbow ring of lights, reflecting the colors in the gay and lesbian pride flag—a clear message that this is a special area for gay men and lesbians.

"If I were coming from out of town, [as a lesbian] I would identify this as a neighborhood that is friendly to gays," said Mary Morten, the mayoral liaison to the lesbian and gay community. "The overarching theme is that this is a diverse community. It's not about it being only a gay hub. But clearly, there is a strong lesbian and gay population in that area."

In March, the City Council passed a domestic partners ordinance extending health insurance benefits to the live-in partners of gay and lesbian city employees.

## MAINE

Citing a lack of volunteers willing to scour the state for signatures, Lewiston resident Paul Madore, a key leader in the drive to overturn recently passed



pro-gay legislation, told the *Sun-Journal* newspaper he doesn't think the campaign will succeed.

The effort was launched in June by Madore's group, the Coalition to End Special Rights, and other conservative Christian groups.

After 20 years of debate, the state Legislature this year amended the Maine Human Rights Act to include gay men and lesbians with other classes protected from discrimination in housing, public accommodations, credit and employment.

Madore and other critics insist sexual minorities don't need legal protections because they are not victims of discrimination.

## MARYLAND

Capt. Michael John, chief spokesperson for Navy Secretary John Dalton, has been charged with soliciting sex from an undercover male police officer.

According to The Associated Press, John, who

was taken into custody Aug. 8 near an adult video store in Annapolis, was among 28 people arrested during a two-week vice squad investigation of the store conducted by local law enforcement.

The 43-year-old servicemember faces two misdemeanor counts of solicitation that carry a combined maximum penalty of two years in jail and a \$1,000 fine. A trial is scheduled Dec. 10.

## MINNESOTA

A Minneapolis man has been charged with damaging property for allegedly breaking the storefront windows of a gay-oriented bookstore and spray-painting words expressing hate for gay people on the building, the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* reported Aug. 20.

Thomas Paul John Hamilton, 49, admitted to police that he vandalized Brother's Touch Bookstore in Minneapolis, according to a criminal complaint filed Aug. 19 in Hennepin County District Court.

Damage to the bookstore exceeds \$500.



## NORTH CAROLINA

Funding for the arts remains a hot topic in Mecklenberg County, reports the *Charlotte Observer*.

The issue has dominated nearly every meeting of the county commission since April 1, when objections to gay characters in a play prompted five commissioners to vote to cut the county's funding of the Charlotte-Mecklenberg Arts and Science Council.

The commission has also revised a new counseling policy aimed at restricting dialogue about sexuality between minors and county-funded counselors. The policy requires parental notification when sexuality is to be discussed and was voted into law as part of the arts council funding cut.

## TEXAS

In separate Aug. 3 incidents—both classified as hate crimes by local authorities—two men leaving Fort Worth gay nightclubs were robbed and beaten, and one was also stabbed in the back after being ordered to strip.

According to the *Dallas Morning News*, police believe two other men seen driving a white car in the area are responsible for both crimes, but did not have any suspects as of that night.

Between 1994 and 1996, four fatal stabbings in Fort Worth and Irving were linked to anti-gay bias. Statewide there have been at least 21 murders of gay men since 1990, reports Dianne Hardy-Garcia, executive director of the Lesbian/Gay Rights Lobby of Texas.

Compiled by Christopher D. Cuttone

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