

national briefs

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

A group of transgender activists has filed a complaint with the D.C. Office of Human Rights.

The complaint alleges that a policy which prohibits male cross-dressers from entering the Lorton Prison to visit inmates violates the city's human rights laws, which ban discrimination based on personal appearance and sexual orientation.

Despite a 1991 agreement arranged by the office to resolve a similar complaint, the prison's ban on cross-dressing visitors remains in place and is announced in bold letters on a large sign on the exterior of one of the prison's buildings, reports the *Washington Blade*.

OHR rules require that parties begin mediation procedures before the office makes a formal determination on whether probable cause of discrimination exists.

Dee Curry, president of Transgenders Against Discrimination in the District, has sent a letter to D.C. Corrections Department head Margaret Moore urging the immediate discontinuation of the policy.



The Washington, D.C.-based Log Cabin Republicans, a gay and lesbian group, applauded the decision by the Human Rights Campaign to hire Tracey St. Pierre, who resigned as chief of staff to Rep. Charles Canady (R-Fla.) in August, and came out as a lesbian Republican.

According to a front-page story in the Sept. 10 issue of the *Hill* newspaper, St. Pierre will lobby Congress on behalf of HRC.

Canady, St. Pierre's former employer, was a lead supporter of the Defense of Marriage Act and the chief sponsor of a bill to roll back federal affirmative action programs.

Richard Tafel, LCR's executive director, says, "I know HRC will get a great deal of flak from the left of our community for hiring someone from a socially conservative Republican office, but it reflects [HRC's] growing understanding that you have to have contacts in all parts of the Republican Party."

FLORIDA

Undercover police officers arrested 20 men for various sex offenses during an Aug. 13 raid of a gay nightclub in Sunny Isles Beach, which is located in North Miami Beach.

The men's names, addresses and mug shots were then publicized, reports the *Washington Blade*. Although police routinely make such information available to the public after an arrest is made, it is rarely released unless requested.

Metro-Dade Police spokesman Ed Munn, however, appended the personal information to a department press statement in the absence of a request from reporters.

In the statement, Munn told reporters that photos of the arrested men were "available for reproduction."

According to Munn's statement, detectives observed patrons and entertainers "masturbating either themselves or others" and three detectives were allegedly groped. The 20 men were generally charged with the misdemeanor offense of lascivious behavior.

Louis J. Terminello, a lawyer for the bar's owners, disputed the police's claim, saying that the dancers were simulating sex acts, not performing them.

ILLINOIS

Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund

and the City of Chicago defeated an attempt by conservative religious activists Sept. 16 to block benefits for domestic partners of lesbian and gay city employees.

Cook County Circuit Court Judge Thomas Durkin upheld the domestic partner benefits program and ruled that the city has authority to make such personnel decisions, according to a *Lambda* news statement.

In March, the City Council passed an ordinance granting health and other benefits to same-sex partners of city workers. Opposition forces led by the Rev. Hiram Crawford failed to obtain a temporary restraining order before the legislation took effect in May, and this latest ruling is an explicit rejection of their argument that the ordinance exceeded Chicago's home rule power.

MAINE

Maine's gay-rights law was put on hold Sept. 18—one day before it was to take effect—after opponents gathered enough signatures for a possible referendum on the antidiscrimination act, reports *The Associated Press*.

Elections officials have 30 days to certify the signatures. If an insufficient number are valid, the law will take effect the following day, Secretary of State Dan Gwadosky said. Otherwise, the law will remain on hold until the referendum comes to a vote, which would be scheduled after November and before April.

The law, approved by the Legislature earlier this year and signed by Gov. Angus King, bars discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in housing, public accommodations, credit and employment.

In 1995, Maine voters narrowly defeated a referendum that sought to outlaw civil rights protections for lesbians and gay men.

MICHIGAN

Towing the party line, Michigan State University trustees voted 5-3 to extend insurance and benefits to the live-in partners of sexual minority employees.

The policy, ratified Sept. 12, does not include unmarried partners of the opposite sex, reports the *Detroit Free Press*.

School officials expect about 40 employees to sign up for coverage that will cost MSU as much as \$100,000 a year. To obtain the coverage, employees must meet eight requirements, including having shared a home for at least six months and signing a partnership agreement.

NEBRASKA

The Rev. Jimmy Creech of Omaha could be the first United Methodist pastor to face official church charges for violating church rules enacted last year that prohibit same-sex commitment ceremonies from being performed on church property.

Despite a warning from his presiding bishop that disciplinary action would follow, Creech announced Sept. 10 that he would perform a ceremony for a lesbian couple at his First United Methodist Church, according to the *Omaha World Herald*.

Mark Bowman, executive director of Reconciling Congregation Program, a Chicago-based network of Methodist congregations that publicly welcome sexual minorities, said he does not know of any cases under the new rules and can recall only one other case—in Boston nearly 25 years ago—in which a pastor was disciplined for conducting a commitment ceremony.

Possible penalties for Creech include suspension, involuntary leave of absence and loss of ministerial credentials.



Compiled by Christopher D. Cuttone

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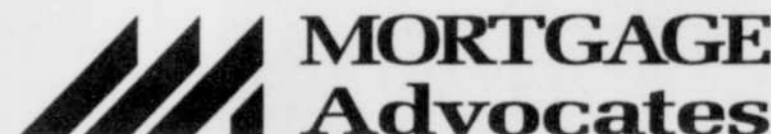


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