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NATIONAL news

ALABAMA

Two women who sell sex toys and four women who claim they need the devices in order to have orgasms are challenging a new state law, effective July 1, that criminalizes distribution of "any device designed or marketed as useful primarily for the stimulation of human genital organs."



According to The Associated Press, violators face up to one year in jail and a maximum fine of \$10,000. Possession of sexual appliances, however, remains legal.

The American Civil Liberties Union, which is helping the women with their lawsuit, issued a statement calling the law an invasion of privacy and a misguided attempt to impose a moral viewpoint on adults.

ALASKA

Voters are preparing to decide in November whether they want to ban same-sex marriage. The Alaska Civil Liberties Union has other plans, though, according to a July 31 report in the *Anchorage Daily News*.

The ACLU is basing its challenge to the proposal, known as Measure 2, on the grounds that it would change the state's constitution—an act allowed only through a state constitutional convention, not the ballot box.

"Our constitution is based on the underlying notion that all people are supposed to be treated equally under the law," says Measure 2 opponent Jennifer Ruddinger. "Measure 2 so fundamentally alters that philosophy of government that it requires a revision of the constitution. That can't be done by voters."

ARKANSAS

The Child Welfare Agency Review Board approved a proposal July 28 prohibiting private agencies from allowing gay men, lesbians or unmarried heterosexuals to serve as foster parents, the *Arkansas Democrat & Gazette* reported July 29.

Exemptions might be made available to cohabiting or single heterosexuals, but not to gay men or lesbians.

The motion to add the restriction was made by board member Robin Woodruff of Little Rock. The sole dissenter, pediatric medical consultant Dr. Bob West of Little Rock, called the measure impractical.

"I think there are a lot of foster children out there and not enough foster parents, and we may run into trouble if we try to limit it to couples only," West observed.

The new regulation must undergo a public comment period before becoming effective.

CALIFORNIA

San Francisco politicians adopted an ordinance Aug. 10 that strengthens the rights of gay and lesbian couples despite a congressional backlash that could cost the city millions of dollars, The Associated Press reported Aug. 11.

The ordinance makes San Francisco the nation's only city that demands private businesses offer domestic partners the same customer discounts they extend to married couples. According to the AP, Mayor Willie Brown says he will sign it.

Most city businesses that might be subject to the law, such as gyms, car rental companies and insurance agencies, already comply. Still, supervisors are determined for the city to set a standard for human rights.

The U.S. House, meanwhile, recently voted 214-212 to block the city from receiving federal housing money because of its year-old Equal Benefits Ordinance, which requires businesses with city contracts to extend health benefits to their workers' domestic partners.

The House measure, which still has to be approved by the Senate, could cost San Francisco up to \$260 million.

"We should not force or coerce [businesses] to adopt policies they find morally objectionable," says Rep. Frank Riggs, a Republican with a mostly rural constituency in Northern California.

State Senate President Pro Tem John Burton, a San Francisco Democrat, issued a statement July 30 announcing that his Senate Bill 844, which would create a red ribbon license plate to help fund AIDS research, had passed with a 22-4 vote and awaited the governor's signature.

If Gov. Pete Wilson signs the bill, the Department of Motor Vehicles will begin producing the plate once it has received 5,000 applications.

Burton's statement explains the fee for the plate is expected to raise \$500,000 annually. The money would fund AIDS research conducted by University of California grant recipients.

HAWAII

In a July 30 press release, the Human Rights Campaign claims the Christian Coalition is blatantly breaking Hawaii's campaign spending laws.

According to HRC, state law requires any group raising more than \$1,000 to support a ballot question—in this case, the ballot measure that would give legislators the power to bar same-sex marriage—must register and file reports with the Campaign Spending Commission.

While neither the Christian Coalition nor the Hawaii Christian Coalition have registered, they've embarked upon a massive fund-raising effort to raise an anticipated \$1.5 million, including an electronic campaign ready to accept credit card payments and a message in boldface type on the HCC website that reads: "Foreign checks also accepted."

Protect Our Constitution and Protect Our Constitution/Human Rights Campaign filed a formal complaint with the Campaign Spending Commission July 30.

ILLINOIS

Two boys at a suburban Chicago community center shared a snorkel. Innocent enough, until the mother of one boy, who is white, returned to the center demanding to know the identity of the other boy, who is African American. She further demanded the African American boy be tested for HIV and streptococcus bacteria, or strep throat.

