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NATIONAL news

ARKANSAS

The Child Welfare League says it's wrong. The North American Council on Adoptable Children says it's wrong. The American Psychological Association says it's wrong. The state of Arkansas, however, seems to think it's just fine to ban gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans people from becoming foster parents.

And, just to prove the point, earlier this month the state's Child Welfare Agency Review Board approved a resolution to enact that ban, according to a Jan. 7 press release from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Specifically, the ban would prevent a child from being placed with anyone who has engaged in same-gender sexual behavior or with anyone who shares a home with someone who has engaged in such behavior.

A comment period, which will include five public hearings, must take place before the ban becomes effective.

If the Child Welfare Agency Review Board is successful, Arkansas will join New Hampshire and Florida as states that ban queer people from adopting and/or becoming foster parents. It is expected that Indiana, Texas and Missouri will introduce similar bans this year.

CALIFORNIA

Dancing feet are no longer welcome in the Castro. Yes, it is true. That mecca of Gay America, ground zero for more than one generation of gay men and lesbians, is now settling into middle age and needs its sleep. As a consequence, dancing in San Francisco's Castro neighborhood is now illegal, reports a Dec. 30 story in the *San Francisco Weekly*.



Where once there was dancing in the street, there is now dancing at only one bar, The Cafe. Strict zoning regulations and neighborhood groups opposing dancing-permit requests have led to the curtailment of street dancing.

Some say it simply isn't right to ban dancing in a neighborhood that is synonymous with gay pride, freedom and celebration.

"The Castro is the heart of the gay community and our gathering place," says a neighborhood bar owner, Morgan Gorrone. "It is a worldwide destination that should have the magic of Mardi Gras. It should be a place where gay people can be free, have fun and dance."

The Castro is zoned as a mixed residential and commercial district. Longtime residents, many now reaching middle age, take the position that Mardi Gras is not an everyday event. People living in the Castro work and have to get up in the morning.

"We know this isn't Peoria, and we don't want it to be," counters Lion Barnett, president of the Eureka Valley Promotion Association. "But we don't want Coney Island, either."

With bar owners pushing for more dancing permits and residents insisting on a quieter neighborhood, the last word has yet to be heard on this issue.

Jim Merrick is an eighth-grade teacher in Bakersfield. He was once honored as teacher of the year for the Rio Bravo-Greeley Union School District.

Last June, Merrick wrote a letter to the *Bakersfield Californian* protesting anti-gay comments made by a member of the Kern County Human Relations Commission.

Parents complained, and 15 students were transferred out of Merrick's classes because their parents disapproved of his homosexuality, reports a Jan. 12 Associated Press story.

Merrick filed a discrimination complaint with the school board. Earlier this month, the board voted unanimously to dismiss his complaint.

Merrick plans to file a complaint with the state labor commissioner. He is also planning to file a lawsuit.

GEORGIA

In early January, the Georgia Commission on the Holocaust called for the deletion of two paragraphs that discuss the treatment of gay people in Nazi concentration camps from guides mailed to middle and high school teachers.

Although sexual minorities were still listed among groups persecuted by the Nazis, the two paragraphs that deal with gay people in concentration camps were removed because "it is not our place to put sexually graphic material into the schools," commission chair Sylvia Wygoda told *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

Gay activists, Jewish community leaders and others protested the commission's decision, according to various media sources. Following the protests, the commission and gay activists reached a compromise: Since it was too late to reprint the 6,000 guides, the Georgia Commission on the Holocaust agreed to send the deleted paragraphs and a cover letter to all teachers who ordered the guide.

Guides that include the paragraphs about gay persecution were sent to teachers in California and Florida.

NEW YORK

Earl Harris, a 31-year-old heterosexual man, was hired in November 1997 as a temporary worker at New York City's Office of Gay and Lesbian Health. Last month, according to the Dec. 30 *New York Post*, Harris filed a lawsuit against the city claiming he was fired for complaining about what he considered to be offensive pictures of naked men having sex.

Harris says he was subjected to "a hostile work environment" in the form of "pictures and postings of nude and naked men engaged in various acts of sexual intercourse."



The suit alleges that "the unwelcome sexually-oriented work environment in which [Harris] found himself created an intimidating, hostile, offensive, oppressive and abusive work environment."

Harris also claims he was fired last March in retaliation for his complaints.

Harris' lawyer, Kenneth Richardson, argues: "It's the same as if you had pictures of naked women in the workplace. It doesn't matter what gender the pictures are, it still creates a sexually hostile work environment."

Harris is seeking removal of the photos, back pay, unspecified damages and legal fees.

Compiled by KRISTINE CHATWOOD