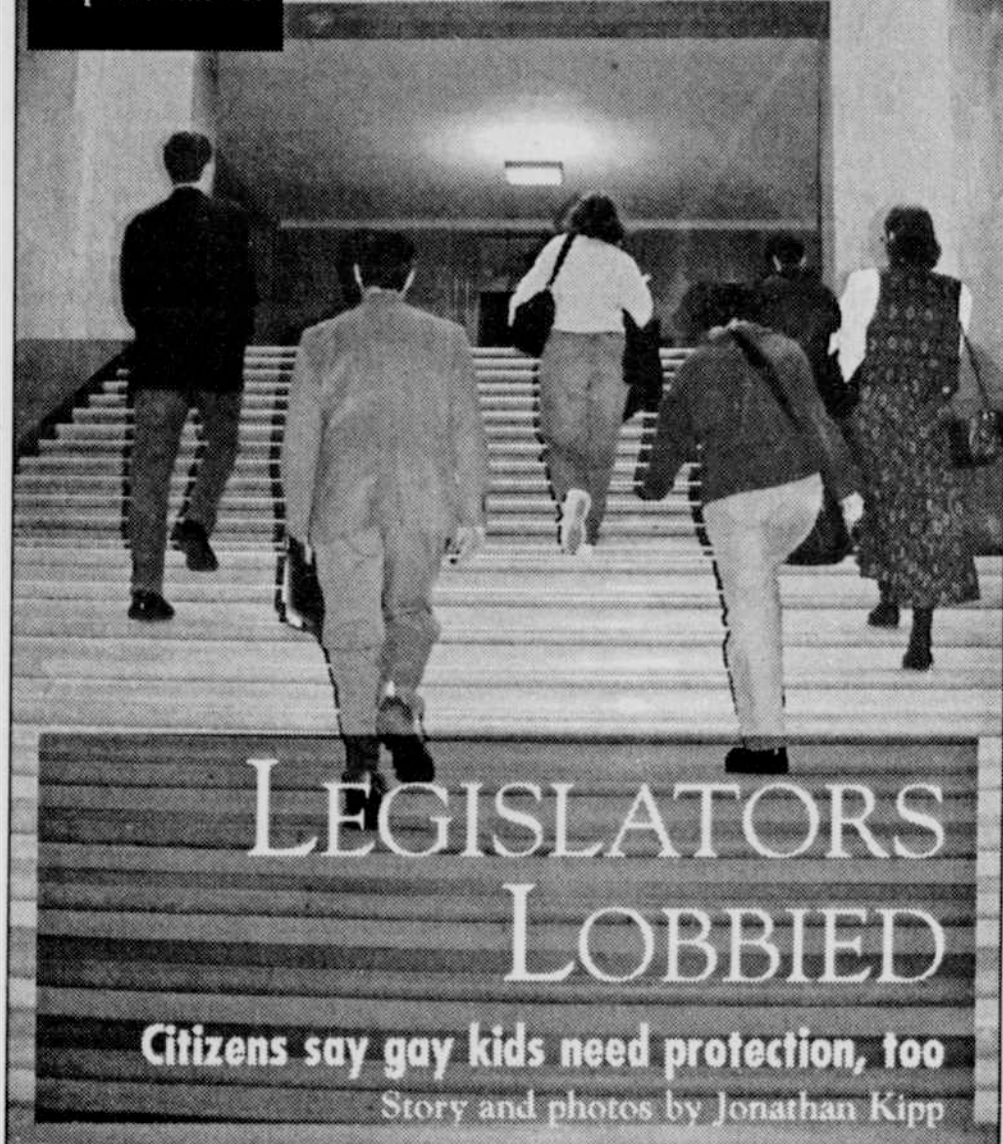


Lobbyists from inner Southeast Portland climb the Capitol steps on their way to the House of Representatives



LEGISLATORS LOBBIED

Citizens say gay kids need protection, too
Story and photos by Jonathan Kipp

After weeks of planning, about 100 supporters of the Safe Schools Bill descended on the Oregon State Capitol building April 19 to lobby fence-sitting lawmakers.

The legislation is in the hands of the House Judiciary Committee, but the activists came to Salem seeking support should it come to the floor for a vote. A duplicate proposal in the Senate hasn't had any movement this session.

House Bill 3247 seeks to protect sexual minority students and those who are perceived to be gay. A recent survey indicated one in 15 Oregon high schoolers had been harassed in the previous 30 days because someone thought he or she was gay.

These students, the poll suggests, are three times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers. The Youth Suicide Task Force's latest prevention plan calls for reducing harassment in schools as a key strategy.

HB 3247 defines discrimination as "any act that unreasonably differentiates treatment, intended or unintended, or any act that is fair in form but discriminatory in operation." It would add sexual orientation and perceived sexual orientation to a list that includes age, disability, national origin, race, marital status, religion and sex.

Supporters say the bill will send a mandate that equal protection is available to all students. Some hope that having safe schools legislation on the state's law books will keep the anti-gay Oregon Citizens Alliance from gain-

Joyce Liljeholm and Tina Barfoot strategize



ing the stronghold on schools that it seems determined to achieve.

Three other states, including Washington, are looking at similar legislation, according to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Face-to-face lobbying, experts say, can be the most effective form of political influence, having a greater impact on law-

makers than letters, phone calls and e-mails.

Rep. Carolyn Tomei, D-Milwaukie, listened carefully as lobbyists gave their pitch. "Great, I'll certainly be supportive," she told them. **J**

Rep. Bill Garrard, R-Klamath Falls, listens to Shari Bandes



Trainers conduct role-playing exercises at the YMCA in downtown Salem



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