

posed to go into effect Oct. 1 but was delayed when an anti-gay group filed petitions to put the measure on the November 2002 ballot. Anne Arundel County Judge Eugene M. Lerner ruled Nov. 21 that Take Back Maryland did not have enough valid signatures for a referendum under state law, which means the act now is forever safe from challenges.

Had there been a referendum, discrimination against individuals because of their sexual orientation could have continued legally until the issue was decided by voters. "This is an enormous victory for Maryland gays and lesbians, who now can live free from prejudice," said Dwight Sullivan, managing attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland's Baltimore office.

After the signatures were filed and certified by the Maryland State Board of Elections, lawyers examined the petitions and found massive irregularities. The ACLU filed suit, charging that the documents did not meet the state constitutional standards for taking a popularly passed law to referendum.

The act was passed by the General Assembly this spring by about a 2-1 margin after 11 years of failed attempts. Gov. Parris Glendening signed the bill May 15.

"Today, Maryland is a safer place for families to live and work," said Erin Leveton, Free State Justice chairwoman. "We're elated. It's another thing to be thankful for."

With the settlement of the lawsuit, Maryland becomes the 12th state to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. The others are California, Hawaii, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Vermont, Rhode Island and Connecticut.

"The tide is turning against right-wing extremists who have been using the ballot box against us for too long," said Lorri L. Jean, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force executive director. "Fair-minded people are tired of their divisiveness and bigotry."

KENTUCKY

In a closely watched case highlighting the dangers posed by President Bush's proposed faith-based initiative, the American Civil Liberties Union appealed part of a lawsuit filed on behalf of a lesbian who was fired by Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children, which receives most of its funding from the state.

Earlier this year, a federal judge said the agency's funding relationship with the state might be an unconstitutional intertwining of church and state but dismissed all of the claims related to Alicia Pedreira's employment. The ACLU filed papers Nov. 20 with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit appealing the constitutional employment claims before the case is tried.

"Alicia Pedreira was fired because this agency thought that a lesbian can't carry out its religious mission," attorney Ken Choe said. "When taxpayers are footing the bill, that's unconstitutional."

Pedreira was a top-notch therapist but was fired when Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children found out she is a lesbian. On the same day she was terminated, the agency enacted a written policy that homosexuality is "inconsistent" with its religious values.

The state's funding of Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children closely mirrors the kind of funding schemes Bush has proposed expanding nationally to funnel public money to religious groups for social services without requiring adequate safeguards against discrimination. The House passed most of the White House plan last summer, but it has not been scheduled for a Senate vote.

"Just today, President Bush went to a soup kitchen to urge Congress to give final approval to his plans for government-funded religion before Christmas," said Terri Schroeder, an ACLU legislative representative. "But we remain confident that the Senate will refuse to adopt the House-passed bill as long as it remains a faith-based prescription for discrimination."



NATIONAL

After coming under fire from national watchdog organizations, an anti-gay Christian Reconstructionist has withdrawn his name for consideration for appointment to the National Labor Relations Board.

According to media sources, President Bush was ready to nominate J. Robert Brame III to serve as a member of the panel despite his long-standing leadership of religious-political extremist groups on the farthest fringes of the right wing. But he dropped out after the National Stonewall Democrats sent a letter of opposition to U.S. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.

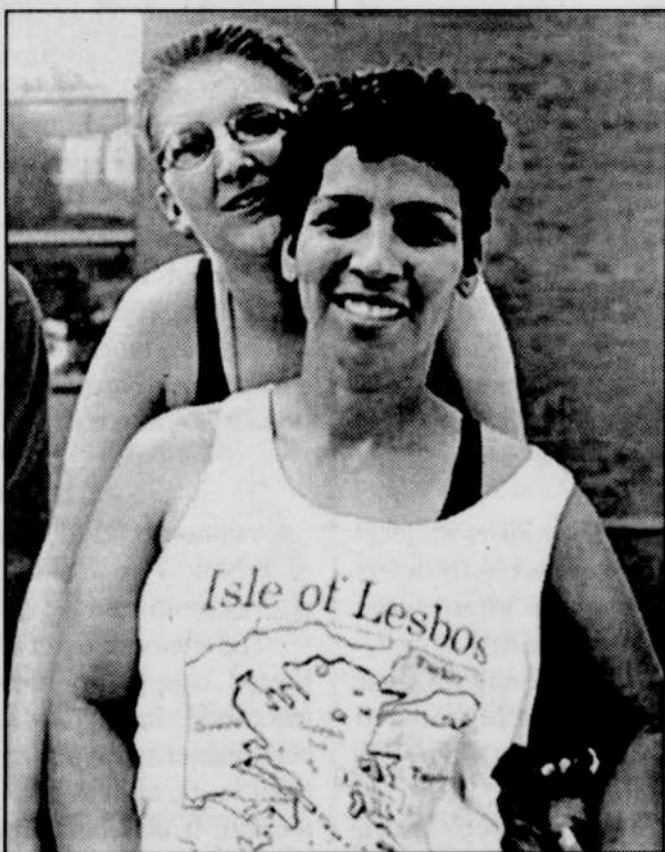
Brame has served as a top official of American Vision, an Atlanta-based organization seeking to replace U.S. secular democracy with a "Christian" regime based on "biblical law," including enforcement of the harsh legal code of the Old Testament. He also has served as an adviser to the Plymouth Rock Foundation, a Massachusetts group with similar views.

Brame recently resigned from the American Vision board after its controversial agenda became public. Although he served in that capacity since at least 1994, he told the *Wall Street Journal* he was unaware of the group's extreme views.

American Vision calls democracy "the first step toward fascism," argues women must be subordinate to men and insists the Bible requires the death penalty for gays. A national watchdog organization said Brame's service with these groups, which are affiliated with the so-called "Christian Reconstructionist" movement, should disqualify him from a post in government.

"Brame and his allies seek to impose a harsh Christian theocracy on the nation," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United for Separation of Church and State executive director. "Someone with such radical political views should automatically be disqualified from holding public office." ■

Compiled by News Editor JIM RADOSTA, who can be reached at jim@justout.com.



This photograph of Alicia Pedreira, submitted without her knowledge in a state fair art competition, led to her termination from Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children

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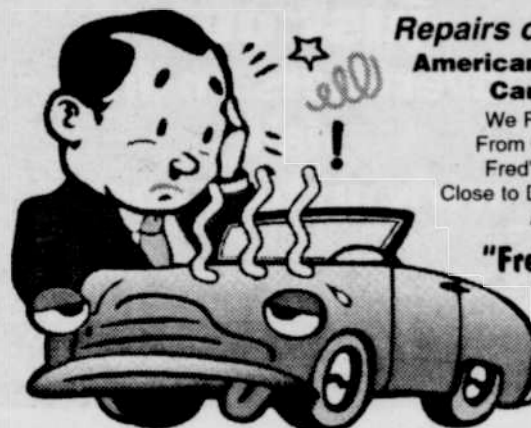
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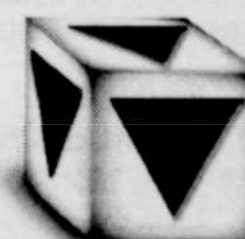


Terri Popejoy
503-495-5765
tpopejoy@aol.com

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