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NATIONAL news

kids is very damaging to these students, who already face harassment and violence," said Heather Sawyer, Lambda senior staff attorney. "The arbitrator's decision sends a message that rejects discrimination against gay students."

Glendon also found that the district discriminated against Chiumento and Salbenblatt because of their sexual orientation. "It is painfully apparent that [the superintendent's] real reason for ordering grievants to take down these displays was that they themselves are gay," he said in his ruling.

In direct response to the removal of the display, students formed a gay-straight alliance at their school. The club since has thrived and now has 25 members.

"Clearly, the school district's actions withheld important and necessary information from these students," said Ruth Harlow, Lambda legal director. "The school administration should now put this behind them and commit to a truly respectful learning environment."

NEW YORK

The state Supreme Court in Kings County heard argument Dec. 10 in a lawsuit challenging a new housing rule that makes it easier for landlords to harass and evict many lesbian and gay couples if they do not divide expenses equally.

Brooklyn Housing v. Lynch seeks to overturn a broad array of anti-tenant regulations, including one prohibiting any rent-stabilized tenant not named on a lease from paying more than a "proportionate share" of the rent. The rule affects thousands of people in New York City and Nassau, Westchester and Rockland counties.

According to Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, the regulation makes lesbian and gay couples vulnerable, because like many married couples it is common for only one partner to be named on the lease and for partners to co-mingle finances and divide rent based on ability to pay. If the partner whose name is on the lease pays less than half the rent, a landlord may try to rely on the rule to evict the couple.

Lambda further argues that before issuing the regulation, the state Division of Housing and Community Renewal failed to comply with New York law requiring it to consider the impact it would have on different groups of tenants, including lesbian and gay couples. The agency also didn't give sufficient advance notice about the rule and consequently denied the public its legal right to comment.

"It would be nice if we could all live like television's *Will & Grace*, but the reality is that many lesbians and gay men struggle financially," said Adam Aronson, Lambda staff attorney. "We have the same money problems that non-gay people do and need housing protections."

Aronson noted married couples are exempted from the regulation. "This is one more reason why lesbian and gay relationships need full legal recognition," he added.

Before the Roommate Law was enacted in 1983, leases could prohibit tenants from living with anyone other than "family members." Landlords regularly used these restrictions to evict unmarried couples, including lesbian and gay couples.

The state Legislature passed the Roommate Law specifically to prohibit landlords from evicting these families based on their marital status. In issuing the new "proportionate share" rule, Aronson says the housing agency is trying to exploit its regulatory authority.

NATIONAL

Existing welfare policies as well as proposals advocated by Bush administration appointees could devastate sexual minority families and individuals, according to a report released Dec. 10 by the Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.



Don Eberly is one of several conservative Bush administration appointees who are helping enact policies that could devastate sexual minority families, a new report says

Welfare reform proposals effectively could bar children of gay, lesbian, bi or trans parents and single or unmarried heterosexual parents from eligibility for benefits like access to Head Start programs and low-interest student loans. Other initiatives could ban sexual minorities from adopting or accessing fertility clinics, make divorce much harder to obtain and stigmatize queer youth in the nation's schools.

"Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people are placed at grave risk by welfare reform," said Lorri L. Jean, NGLTF executive director. "These initiatives are fundamentally about family policy—about promoting particular kinds of families while penalizing and stigmatizing others. Welfare is an issue of concern to all of us because how we treat the most vulnerable in our society says a lot about who we are."

Featured prominently is the so-called "charitable choice" faith-based initiative. It threatens to hand over entire social service sectors—\$80 billion over 10 years—to anti-gay religious providers who legally can discriminate against sexual minorities and people of other religions and who can engage in sectarian proselytizing with tax dollars.

The welfare reform act of 1996, officially called the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, is up for reauthorization in 2002. The outcome surely will be influenced by former prominent conservative movement leaders who now hold key policymaking positions within the Bush administration, such as Wade Horn, Don Eberly and Andrew Bush.

Leaving Our Children Behind: Welfare Reform and the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Community documents their reactionary agenda to change social service provision in the United States. Although measures such as fatherhood initiatives, marriage initiatives, abstinence-only education and charitable choice might stem from good intentions, they make for bad public policy, according to the report.

Some of the more extreme proposals include:

- Prioritizing the children of married heterosexual parents over other low-income children in the distribution of limited-supply benefits like Head Start slots and financial aid. Only if anything is left over would the kids of single parents and same-sex couples be allowed to access these benefits.
- Forcing lesbian and bi women temporarily relying on welfare to allow their children's biological fathers to co-parent or else risk losing benefits.
- Outlawing adoption and the use of fertility clinics by same-sex couples and unmarried individuals.
- Ending no-fault divorce and requiring mutual consent of both spouses before divorce is granted.