

NATIONAL news

orientation of its partners." New York law, he noted, does not define "spouses" as people of different sexes. While Dunne's ruling doesn't determine whether same-sex couples should be treated as spouses "for all purposes," it will have significant implications.

"This is a breakthrough ruling for same-sex couples in New York and elsewhere," attorney Adam Aronson said. "For more than two years, we've been waiting for a Vermont civil union to be treated appropriately in other states, and today we have that court ruling. This is a significant building block toward securing full equality for same-sex relationships."

St. Vincent's Hospital, in the heart of Manhattan's Greenwich Village, had asked the state court to block John Langan from suing for wrongful death and medical malpractice, claiming that because he and Neal Conrad Spicehandler were gay, their 15-year relationship should not be recognized legally. In addition to the civil union, the couple had several legal documents reflecting their relationship, and the hospital treated Langan as Spicehandler's spouse throughout the medical ordeal.



State Sen. Jeff Wentworth authored the Texas Defense of Marriage Act

TEXAS

"It's nothing more than a slap in the face to the LGBT community of this state." That's how Lesbian/Gay Rights Lobby of Texas executive director Randall Ellis described a Senate vote April 16 to bar the recognition of same-sex marriages or civil unions performed outside the state.

On a third and final reading, senators passed the bill on to the floor of the House. State Sen. Jeff Wentworth, R-San Antonio, authored the bill, which Ellis said is a just variation on a familiar theme in Texas politics.

"The passage of [the Defense of Marriage Act] by the Texas Senate illustrates a fact that gays and lesbians know all too well: Texas discriminates," he said. "Gays and lesbians are denied literally hundreds upon hundreds of rights and privileges—everything from tax exemptions to hospital visitation rights."

Senate Bill 7 originally was filed as Senate Bill 630, but Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst asked Wentworth to refile it, a strategic move that allowed the legislation to be assigned the lower number, indicating a higher priority.

Ellis doubts the bill will hold up to judicial scrutiny in the coming years if it becomes law. "In 1967 the U.S. Supreme Court struck down laws that prohibited interracial marriages because they deprived individuals of the fundamental right to marry. This bill clearly violates the fundamental rights of gays and lesbians."

The act has a companion, House Bill 38 by Rep. Warren Chisum, R-Pampa. The House Committee on State Affairs already has heard the legislation and sent its own version to the Calendar Committee, where it will be scheduled for a vote by the full chamber.

The House State Affairs Committee held a hearing April 22 on House Bill 1911, which



Aimee Gelnow

would prohibit the placement of children in a foster home with any unmarried individuals. Since Texas does not allow for civil unions or same-sex marriage, gay and lesbian Texans, in effect, would be banned from serving as foster parents.

"This bill does nothing but harm the children in the Texas foster care system," said Aimee Gelnow, Family Pride Coalition executive director. "These legislators should be working to improve the state's foster care system rather than systematically wreaking havoc on previously displaced, abused and neglected children and their foster families."

Another piece of legislation, HB 194, would prevent Texas queers from serving as foster parents and mandate that all prospective foster parents be asked if they are homosexual or bisexual. Similar legislation in Oklahoma, HB 1308, would ban "a homosexual, bisexual or lesbian" from adopting in the state.

"Children are best served when life-changing foster care decisions are made by child welfare professionals, not politicians," said Sue Marriott, an Austin mother of two and member of the Family Pride Coalition board. "Supporters of this bill have tried to make this a morality issue. We don't believe it's moral to remove a child from the only stable home he or she might have known just because their foster parents are gay or unmarried. And it's certainly not moral to let hard-to-place children languish in an already overburdened foster care system."

MASSACHUSETTS

Police are investigating the circumstances surrounding the April 9 assault on Concord-Carlisle High School student Caitlin Muses, who reportedly had been harassed with homophobic epithets by her alleged attacker for participating in the Day of Silence Project.

The annual activity is aimed at ending violence leveled at students who are or are perceived to be queer. It is coordinated by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, whose executive director founded the organization while teaching at Concord Academy, where he advised the nation's first Gay Straight Alliance.

"Caitlin was one of more than 200,000 students who courageously took action...to continue the progress we have made in reducing violence and harassment aimed at LGBT students in our schools, a movement which started in her hometown," Kevin Jennings said. "I am deeply saddened to see Caitlin become a victim of violence herself, and we are now more determined than ever to carry forward our work to end harassment and violence in our schools today."

FLORIDA

State Sen. Anna Cowin, R-Leesburg, has blocked progress on a safe schools bill by proposing a series of amendments to the Dignity for All Students Act including references to obscene phone calls and sex with corpses and animals.

"We can only guess at her intentions, because the sheer volume of her amendments have blocked even so much as a hearing on the bill," said Nadine Smith, Equality Florida executive director. "Either she thinks dealing with



State Sen. Anna Cowin has blocked progress on a Florida safe schools bill

school safety is a joke or she's manipulating the system to block any real debate on a critical school safety issue."

The act would require schools getting public tax dollars to ban harassment and discrimination, provide training to educators to deal with these situations before they escalate to violence and ensure the effectiveness of the training is tracked. It has drawn strong bipartisan support and has more than 22 sponsors in the House and Senate.

Similar laws have passed in eight states, and three others are considering such legislation. While most states have passed the laws in response to educators, students, parents and community requests, some have been compelled to act by costly lawsuits.

The bill protects all students and provides specific guidelines around harassment based on race, color, religion, national origin, marital status, sex or gender, disability or sexual orientation. Despite the inclusiveness of the bill, opponents have most often targeted "sexual orientation" despite research showing that students perceived to be gay or lesbian are the most frequent targets of the most vicious harassment.

ARKANSAS

The American Civil Liberties Union has filed suit in federal court against the Pulaski County Special School District for its treatment of an openly gay 14-year-old student. The lawsuit contends that officials violated Thomas McLaughlin's rights to free speech, equal protection and privacy and that they violated the establishment clause of the First Amendment by preaching to him and forcing him read the Bible as punishment.

"We tried to work with the district to reach a settlement that would protect Thomas McLaughlin's constitutional rights and allow him to be open about his sexual orientation," said James Esseks, ACLU Lesbian and Gay Rights Project litigation director. "They were offered ample opportunity to do the right thing here, but the district refused to meet our demands so we're taking them to court to ensure that other lesbian and gay students in the district wouldn't face similar discrimination."

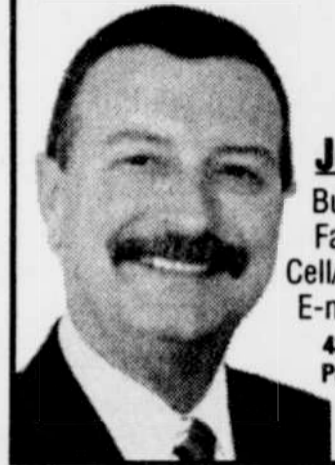
In papers filed April 8 with the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Arkansas, the ACLU is seeking an injunction to prevent Jacksonville Junior High School from further restricting McLaughlin's speech with regard to his sexual orientation or past discipline he's been subjected to by officials. "All I want out of this is for me and other gay students to be able to go to school without being preached to and without being expected to lie about who we are," he said. [M]

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

COLDWELL BANKER

EADIE ADAMS REALTY

"For Your Palm Springs Place in the Sun"



John W. Butler

Bus: (760) 778-5500
Fax: (760) 323-7832
Cell/Pgr: (760) 774-0685
E-mail: ccsvs@aol.com
431 South Palm Canyon
Palm Springs, CA 92262



Oregon Camera
Everything Photographic

We have a knowledgeable, friendly staff helping you find the right camera, binoculars, or photographic accessories.

A 'family' owned and operated business since 1997.

582 SW Adams Avenue (541) 753-2653
Corvallis, OR 97333 www.oregoncamera.com

UNIQUE HOME & GARDEN ART, GIFTS & MORE



Living By The Garden

1829 NE Alberta
Portland (503) 287-4144

Chuck Floyd

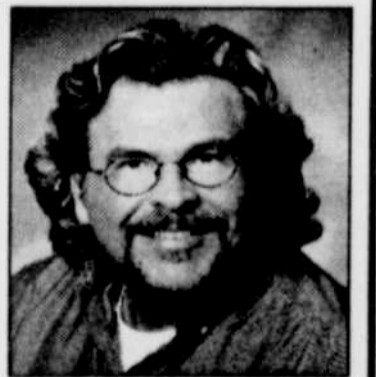
Hair Design for Women & Men

Experienced Hair Care Services

Haircuts Starting at \$23

Color Starting at \$30

Perms Starting at \$50



4613 SE Woodstock Blvd
(Located in Transformations Salon)

503-493-9453

by Appointment

www.chuckfloyd.com