

NATIONAL news

gay priests, the *Globe* reporters often—but not always—directly refuted those claims,” she points out. “Independent social science research is quite clear that gay men are not more likely to commit child sexual abuse than nongay men.”

More subtle or indirect connotations of homosexuality and child sexual abuse occurred more frequently and were rarely challenged within articles. As an example, Russell notes an article that cites several incidents of priests abusing children yet begins with a description of a sexual encounter between two adult men. Placing stories of the scandal alongside descriptions of other inappropriate behaviors and emphasizing the victims’ sex also help create a misleading association between homosexuality and abuse, according to the report.

In the latest skirmish concerning President Bush’s scheme for government-funded religion, the American Civil Liberties Union urged a House panel Sept. 25 to adopt a measure to preserve civil rights protections and prohibit tax dollars from being diverted to fund religious activities. U.S. Rep. Lynn Woolsey, D-Calif., offered the amendment during the House Education and Workforce Committee’s consideration of legislation that would reauthorize the Community Services Block Grant Act through 2009.



Lynn Woolsey

“The Woolsey amendment, if adopted, would help bring the block grant program into compliance with the Constitution,” said Christopher E. Anders, an ACLU attorney. “It mirrors the parameters established by the Supreme Court to ensure that taxpayer dollars do not fund religious discrimination or religious activities. Without the Woolsey amendment, the block grant program would be open to groups who violate the civil rights of religious minorities and inhibit their access to vital federal services.”

While the language of the block grant act states that no funds may be used for “inherently religious activities,” the measure fails to clarify what would fall under that purview. The ACLU said similar guidelines used in other federal activities have led to programs being implemented that were later found to be unconstitutional. For example, one faith-based organization that received federal funds used Bible stories in its vocational training programs.

Religious organizations can participate in federal programs if they are operated in a secular manner and if civil rights protections are upheld. But the current bill allows government-funded religious groups to discriminate against employees in federally funded programs, which the ACLU said is clearly unconstitutional.

A resolution was introduced Sept. 29 at the American Academy of Family Physicians’ Congress of Delegates in New Orleans

to rescind an inclusive parenting policy adopted at last year’s meeting.

The existing statement calls on the group to “establish policy and be supportive of legislation which promotes a safe and nurturing environment, including psychological and legal security, for all children, including those of adoptive parents, regardless of the parents’ sexual orientation.” Kenneth Haller, Gay and Lesbian Medical Association president, is asking family physicians to contact their state chapter delegates to express their support for the 2002 position statement supporting equal protections for same-sex parents and their kids.

“The AAFP’s current policy is firmly based in evidence-based medicine,” he said. “We urge all family physicians who are members of the academy to contact their representatives and let them know how important this policy is for all families.”

Haller added that nonphysicians can make their voices heard, too. “If your health care provider is a family physician, let her or him know how vital this policy is to our lives and to the health of our children, and ask them to contact their AAFP delegates. When our health is at stake, it is more important than ever for all of us to share the realities of our lives as LGBT persons.”

Haller concluded: “In February 2002, the [American Academy of Pediatrics] passed a similar resolution supporting families headed by same-sex parents. The following Sept. 20, resolutions were introduced to overturn the policy.... All were decisively defeated. I am confident that my colleagues at the AAFP will likewise place science and justice above ignorance and bigotry.”



Alan Van Capelle

NEW YORK

Gov. George Pataki signed a bill Sept. 23 addressing bias crime on college and university campuses in the state.

“The governor’s signature to this bill means New York’s colleges and universities will be safer for all students, including gay and lesbian students,” said Alan Van Capelle, Empire State Pride Agenda executive director. “We thank Gov. Pataki for signing this bill into law, and we thank both chambers of the Legislature for sending it to him with their unanimous support.”

The measure—which the Senate passed June 19 after the Assembly passed an identical version of the bill June 16—calls for both public and private colleges and universities to inform every incoming student about bias crime and the policies in place regarding bias

crime. It also requires institutions to file with the state education department their plan to educate students on this matter.

In the bill, bias-related crimes are defined as those recognized under the Hate Crimes Act of 2000, which protects people who are targeted because of their race, color, national origin, ancestry, gender, religion, age, disability and sexual orientation. The measure also allows colleges to go further than state law in the types of bias crimes addressed, which could include attacks based on gender identity and expression.



Nizah Morris



Roslyn Wilkins

PENNSYLVANIA

A lawsuit was filed Sept. 16 in U.S. District Court in connection with the December 2002 death of Nizah Morris, a popular Philadelphia entertainer and member of the trans and African American communities.

On the evening of Dec. 21, she attended a Christmas party at the Key West Bar and Grille in Center City. After she became too intoxicated to make her own way home, concerned citizens called 911 to obtain medical assistance.

An ambulance was en route when Philadelphia police officer Elizabeth Skala arrived on the scene. She called off the ambulance and drove Morris to a location where, minutes later, Morris was fatally wounded by a blow to the head. Morris was eventually transported to Jefferson Hospital, where she died on Christmas Eve.

“This lawsuit raises compelling issues about procedures used by city police and paramedics that may violate citizens’ constitutional rights,” said attorney Paul Messing, who represents Roslyn Wilkins, Morris’ mother and the administrator of the estate. “The complaint alleges conduct by city employees that increased the danger to Ms. Morris and ultimately led to her death. Separately, the bar placed Ms. Morris in danger by continuing to serve her once she was intoxicated. As a result of the conduct of all defendants, and their willful disregard of Ms. Morris’ safety, the complaint alleges that all of the defendants are responsible for her death.”

Lee Carpenter, staff attorney at the Center for Lesbian and Gay Civil Rights, added: “Although the damages suffered by Ms. Morris’ family are staggering, this case is not about money. It is about using every means at our disposal to finally obtain answers to questions about how and why Nizah died.”

Lee Carpenter



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

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