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**NORTHWEST newsbriefs**

**PORTLANDERS RALLY FOR MARRIAGE EQUALITY**

Love Makes a Family held its sixth annual Freedom to Marry Day Celebration on Feb. 12 at Portland City Hall. The event was one of dozens held nationwide to call attention to the growing movement for marriage equality.

Among the speakers was attorney Rick Fernandez, chairman of the American Friends Services Committee's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Issues Program, who recently celebrated his 18th anniversary with partner Henry Miller. He had strong words for anti-gay Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney.

"It's shameful to see the governor of Massachusetts—who is a Mormon and who should know better, since his own church was forced to give up its particular religious beliefs on marriage as a result of the hostile oppression of the majority back in the 1800s—to see him campaigning so forcefully in defiance of his own Supreme Court's clear decision on marriage," Fernandez said. "He, like [Alabama's] George Wallace before him, will be remembered in shame as the governor who stood at the doorway of the schoolhouse, denying access to those of his citizens who he saw as less equal than others."

**COURT ASKED TO RECONSIDER FLORIDA ADOPTION DECISION**

Attorneys have asked the U.S. Court of Appeals in Atlanta to reconsider its recent ruling upholding a Florida law that excludes gay people from adopting.

"The appeals court completely misunderstood the Supreme Court's ruling in Lawrence vs. Texas, which says that states can no longer make up reasons to discriminate against gay people," said Matt Coles, director of the American Civil Liberties Union's Lesbian and Gay Rights Project. "Sexual orientation has nothing to do with a person's ability to parent, and this law has nothing to do with child welfare. For the sake of the thousands of children in Florida in need of a home, we hope the court will reconsider."

In a motion filed Feb. 18, the court was asked to reconsider the ruling. The three-judge panel that issued the decision could agree to reconsider the case, the full court could decide to do so, or the court could decline to rehear the case at all.

"The Florida law was passed to punish gay people, but the sad, harsh reality is that it harms the 4,800 children who are languishing in Florida's foster care system and waiting to be adopted into permanent, loving homes," said Howard Simon, ACLU of Florida executive director. "While Florida claims the law is justified because children should be with married mothers and fathers, these children don't have any permanent family. For a court to accept this justification flies in the face of our Constitution."

The ACLU brought the lawsuit in 1998 on behalf of four gay men who wanted to adopt in Florida but were prevented from doing so by the adoption ban. The law was passed 27 years ago in response to Anita Bryant's infamous anti-gay campaign. A three-judge panel of the Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit issued a decision upholding the law Jan. 29.

While the state will not let gay people adopt, it does rely on gay people to be foster parents. Among the plaintiffs in the case are Portlanders Steven Lofton and Roger Croteau, who are raising five children, including three foster kids from Florida. Although the Florida children—two 16-year-olds and a 12-year-old—have never known any other family, the couple cannot adopt them because of the anti-gay law.

**YOUTH MOBILIZE AGAINST HIV/AIDS**

More than 600 people came to Portland from as far away as Alaska and Puerto Rico for the 11th annual Ryan White National Youth Conference on HIV and AIDS.

The gathering, which was held from Feb. 13 to 16 at the Hilton Hotel, consisted of numerous institutes, workshops and panels aimed at developing and supporting youth leadership to defeat the epidemic. Organizers also set up a colorful "activism room" where youth could write letters to Congress, create art and read information posted on the walls:

- "51 percent of all new cases are among people younger than 25."
- "Many sexually experienced teens have not been tested for HIV, so the actual number of poz youth is considered to be much higher than the reported number."
- "Don't preach to the choir...chill with Republicans, schmooze with frat boys, drink with NASCAR dads."

The closing keynote speaker was U.S. Sen.



Rick Fernandez (left) and Bonnie Tinker speak up for marriage equality Feb. 12 at Portland City Hall

PHOTOS BY JIM RADOSTKA