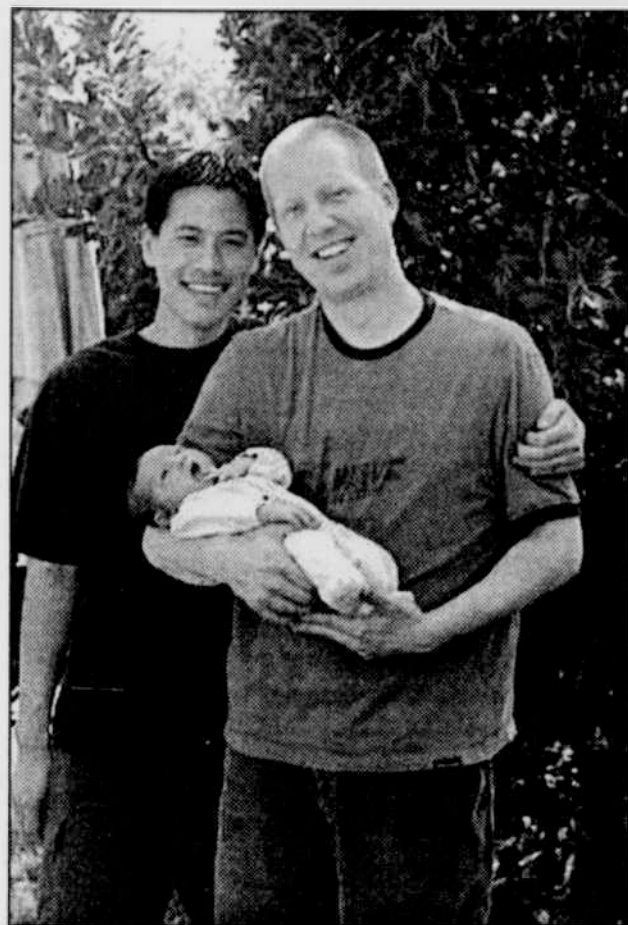


**NATIONAL news**



After being rejected by Adoption.com, Rich and Michael Butler adopted a daughter, Emily Celine

**CALIFORNIA**

In a decision issued May 2, a federal district court judge ruled that a suit against Adoption.com for discriminating against same-sex couples can proceed to trial.

Adoption.com is the largest adoption-related Internet business in the United States. Among other for-profit services, it permits prospective adoptive parents to post their personal profiles in hopes of connecting with potential birth mothers. It does not, however, permit same-sex couples to post their profiles.

In 2002, it refused to accept an application from San Jose residents Rich and Michael Butler, who have been together eight years and who sought to post their profiles on one of Adoption.com's Web sites. The couple filed a lawsuit challenging this policy under California law, which prohibits businesses from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation.

In an initial victory for the Butlers, Judge Phyllis Hamilton rejected Adoption.com's argument that it does not have to comply with state nondiscrimination laws, stating: "Here, the burdens posed on defendants—allowing same-sex couples to be listed on their Web sites—do not clearly exceed the benefits, which include providing prospective birth mothers with a greater number of potential adoptive parents from which to choose, possibly leading to a greater likelihood that children will be placed in a stable home."

Kate Kendell, National Center for Lesbian Rights executive director, said: "Hamilton's ruling is a victory for all children in this state. We are long past the day when adoption agencies or businesses can exclude loving, competent parents simply because they are lesbian or gay."

**CONNECTICUT**

Republican Gov. John Rowland is being urged to sign into law a hate crimes measure passed by a strong bipartisan coalition. House Bill 5657 would amend existing hate crimes law to include gender identity and expression and disability.

The Connecticut Senate passed the measure April 30 by a vote of 33-0, with three abstentions. The House passed the bill by a 139-4 vote April 22.

"We have worked hard and

effectively over the last few years educating legislators and the public on the issues surrounding gender identity and expression," said Jerimarie Liesegang, Connecticut TransAdvocacy Coalition director. "Given the overwhelmingly positive vote by both the Connecticut House and Senate, we now urge Gov. Rowland to sign this bill into law."

**UTAH**

The American Civil Liberties Union has come to the defense of a group of Salt Lake City students who were punished for wearing anti-smoking "Queers Kick Ash" T-shirts to school. Officials also threatened to ban the school's Gay Straight Alliance, and dozens of students wore the T-shirts May 11 in protest.

In a letter sent to Hillcrest High School, attorneys demanded that officials remove any suspensions from the students' records, allow them to wear the shirts without fear of punishment and drop threats against the GSA. "The Supreme Court has firmly established that students have a constitutional right to political speech and expression, and when *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* is one of the most popular programs on television and universities all over the country have queer theory and queer studies programs, there's no doubt that it's a commonly used political term," attorney Tamara Lange said.

Three students who wore the shirts were punished May 6 by assistant principal David Breen, who told them that the shirts were inappropriate and that he disapproved of the word "queer." Two gay male students were given three options: taking the shirts off, turning them inside out or suspension. One turned his shirt inside out and was allowed to stay at school; the other refused and was suspended. A heterosexual girl who wore the same shirt was given an additional fourth option of being sent home for the day without suspension, which she accepted.

When more students wore the shirts to school and were similarly punished May 7, Breen also threatened to bring the GSA, which wasn't involved in distributing the T-shirts, to "a screeching halt."

**TEXAS**

In response to a demand letter from attorneys, Lago Vista High School has "suspended" its policy prohibiting same-sex prom dates in time for student Sherrell Ingram to bring her best friend, another female, as her guest to the dance.

In seeking relief from the school's discriminatory policy, Ingram and her mother, Ginger White, were represented by People for the American Way Foundation. In a letter sent May 3 to principal Donna Larkin, the organization insisted that the school drop its discriminatory policy, or it would leave the family no choice but to file a lawsuit.

"I'm delighted with this result," attorney Jeremy D. Wright said. "Now Sherrell can concentrate on other pressing issues, like finding a pair of shoes to match her prom dress."

In addition to the fact that the policy prohibited Ingram, who is not gay, from taking her friend to the prom, she and her mother were concerned that it unfairly and illegally discriminated against gay students. Attorneys explained to Larkin that the policy constituted unlawful and unconstitutional sex discrimination. With the prom scheduled for May 15, the letter gave the school a deadline of May 7 to avoid legal action.

In a letter sent May 7, counsel for the Lago Vista Independent School District stated that while the district does not agree with People for the American Way's analysis of the legal issues, the prom attendance guidelines will be suspended "for the remainder of this year until the district has an opportunity to further evaluate its role in the sponsorship of school social activities."



After Nikki Youngblood was told she could not wear a jacket and tie for her senior yearbook picture, her mom paid for a separate photo

**FLORIDA**

Former Robinson High School student Nikki Youngblood and the Hillsborough County School Board have agreed to a settlement that brings to a close her two-year lawsuit challenging a policy requiring girls to wear an ultra-feminine scoop neck drape for their senior portraits, the National Center for Lesbian Rights announced May 7.

Male students were permitted to wear traditional professional attire—a white shirt and tie of their choosing. This policy, based on outdated notions of "appropriate" female attire, is strictly enforced by the school and its agents.

Youngblood and her mother objected to the requirement that she wear traditionally feminine attire and asked school officials to permit her to appear in her photo wearing a formal shirt and jacket. Administrators refused to provide her with any alternative, insisting that she must either wear the drape or be excluded from the yearbook. As a result, she was not included in the yearbook with the other seniors.

Under the new policy agreed to as part of the settlement agreement, the school must allow for exemptions from any sex-differentiated dress codes.

"I'm just happy that no other female student will have to be excluded from her senior yearbook just because she doesn't want to conform to someone else's gender stereotypes," Youngblood said. "All along my goal has been to make sure that no other student has to go through what I did. With this settlement, I believe we have achieved that goal." □

Compiled by News Editor  
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Activists are urging Connecticut Gov. John Rowland (left, with President Bush at the White House) to sign a trans-inclusive hate crimes bill

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