

The Defense of Marriage Coalition submitted more than 244,000 signatures June 30 in Salem to place an initiative on the fall ballot to amend the Oregon Constitution to permanently deny same-sex couples equal marriage rights.

Secretary of State Bill Bradbury has 30 days to verify the petitions. Considering only 100,800 valid signatures are required, it appears the coalition will likely succeed in placing the Defense of Marriage Act on the ballot.

Basic Rights Oregon will launch a statewide campaign to defeat the measure along with a coalition of other progressive organizations. It already has started raising funds, rented an office and hired an experienced campaign leadership team.

"While it is disappointing that the measure is likely to be on the November ballot, we are committed to defending the thousands of Oregonians who would be profoundly harmed by a loss of equal marriage protections and responsibilities," said Roey Thorpe, BRO executive director. "This campaign will be divisive and costly to all Oregonians. We wish we did not have to face this measure, but we are prepared."

The campaign will be managed by Aisling Coghlan, who has been a key player in numerous campaigns, including the successful defeat of two Bill Sizemore measures and one Don McIntire measure. She will be joined by general campaign strategist Liz Kaufman, who was instrumental in successful defeats of Measures 13 and 9, and Gwenn Baldwin, who formed a winning communications strategy for Measure 13.

Coghlan hopes the campaign will appeal to Oregonians' fundamental sense of fairness.

"The Oregon Constitution is a promise that all of our basic rights, including equal marriage rights, are guaranteed," she said. "We believe Oregonians will agree that the ballot should never be used to take con-

SIGNED, SEALED AND DELIVERED?

With an anti-gay constitutional amendment headed for the fall ballot, BRO files complaints over petition tactics by Jim Radosta

stitutional rights away."

As one of the more than 3,000 same-sex couples already married in Oregon, Mary Li and Rebecca Kennedy now wonder what will become of their nearly four-month marriage.

"What will we tell our daughter, Ava?" Li said. "Our marriage helps to protect our family. How do any of us who are parents explain why people don't want us to have the protections and responsibilities of marriage?"

Two days before the signatures were submitted, BRO filed complaints in Salem detailing widespread abuses in the circulation of petitions for the measure. It called on the coalition to immediately and voluntarily cease such activities and asked Bradbury to throw out signatures unlawfully obtained in connection with these tactics.

"With an issue of this magnitude that has so much potential to affect people's lives, we were very



PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

Roey Thorpe says Basic Rights Oregon is prepared to launch a campaign to fight the anti-gay ballot measure

dismayed at the number of complaints we received about the Defense of Marriage Coalition's tactics to place this measure on the ballot," Thorpe said. "The numbers alone were upsetting, but the nature of these complaints was especially disturbing."

These alleged abuses include requiring food bank clients to sign the petition prior to receiving food baskets; falsely swearing that signatures were witnessed by circulators when in fact they were left unattended at churches; misrepresenting the petition; and using coercive signature collection techniques. Thorpe said these are clear violations of Oregon election laws, federal laws concerning the distribution of food at "faith-based" food banks and the ethics of democracy.

BRO has monitored the signature collection process statewide since the initiative was approved for circulation in May in hopes of preventing the measure from reaching the ballot. The opposition has claimed this monitoring was an attempt to undermine the democratic initiative process.

"While we abhor efforts to place this kind of measure on the ballot, we respect the right of citizens to use the initiative process," Thorpe said, "but the fact is that without the law, there is no democracy." □

HOW TO HELP

- **Verify valid signatures:** BRO will train 60 volunteers to team with a state staff member to review each petition to ensure it was correctly filled out and to determine that it was signed by registered voters. Call 503-222-6151.

- **Set up the campaign office:** BRO is seeking 15 people to help July 5 with moving into the campaign headquarters, which also needs office supplies. E-mail alissa@basicrights.org.

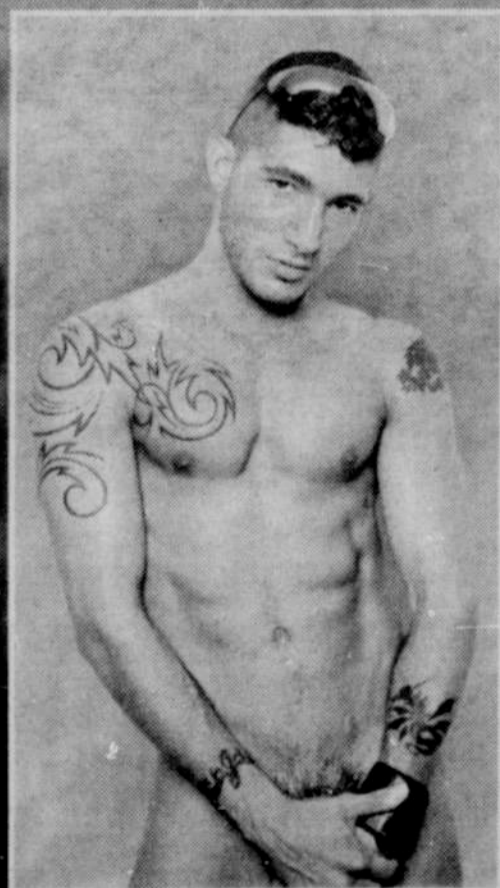
- **Join the speaker's bureau:** People will be trained to speak at community meetings across the state about the ballot measure. E-mail alissa@basicrights.org.

- **Host a house party:** Gather friends and neighbors together to talk about the measure and why it needs to be defeated in November. E-mail bill@basicrights.org.

- **Become active with the campaign:** Volunteers can assist with data entry, voter identification, phone banks and canvassing. E-mail info@basicrights.org.

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