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NATIONAL Higher Education Act Could Bar Queer Students

Under a proposed amendment to the Higher Education Act pending before Congress, private Christian colleges and universities would be exempt from compliance with anti-discrimination laws, allowing them to legally reject students based on sexual orientation.

The amendment would prohibit accrediting boards from taking a school's adherence to discrimination laws into account when determining whether to grant accreditation to that school, effectively giving the green light to those schools maintaining that their Christian beliefs mandate the exclusion of sexual minority students.

Christian schools including Brigham Young, Notre Dame, Pepperdine, Baylor and others have lobbied extensively for the amendment's passage.

In a joint statement issued upon the amendment's successful emergence from committee, Senate Democrats blasted the measure. "We believe that the amendment is not warranted in light of current practices by accrediting agencies and could have tremendous implications for the independence of accrediting agencies in determining appropriate standards for accreditation."

Survey Sheds New Light on Queer Students' Experiences

The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network announced findings April 26 from the 2005 National School Climate Survey, which documents the experiences of queer students in America's schools. The results were released at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., in conjunction with GLSEN's 10th national Day of Silence.

"The 2005 National School Climate Survey reveals that anti-LGBT bullying and harassment remain commonplace in America's schools," said Kevin Jennings, GLSEN founder and executive director.

Three-quarters of students heard derogatory remarks such as "faggot" or "dyke" frequently or often at school, and nearly nine out of 10 (89.2 percent) reported hearing "that's so gay" or "you're so gay"—meaning stupid or worthless—frequently or often.

More than a third (37.8 percent) of students experienced physical harassment at school on the basis of sexual orientation and more than a quarter (26.1 percent) on the basis of their gender expression. Nearly one-fifth (17.6 percent) of students had been physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation and more than a 10th (11.8 percent) because of their gender expression.

Overall, queer students were twice as likely as the general population of students to report they were not planning to pursue any post-secondary education.

NEW YORK Rights Groups Press High Court on Marriage Laws

In 14 friend-of-the-court briefs filed with the New York Court of Appeals, national and statewide religious and civil rights leaders and organizations are urging the court to put an end to state laws that deny same-sex couples the protections of marriage. The court will hear oral arguments May 31 in lawsuits brought by the American Civil Liberties

Union, Lambda Legal and others on behalf of same-sex couples.

"It's wrong for New York to continue to deny same-sex couples and their children equal protections for their families," said Victor Bolden, general counsel of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Legal Defense & Educational Fund. "The constitution protects the right of individuals to marry whomever they love regardless of race, gender or sexual orientation."

The brief filed by the fund explains that laws that bar same-sex couples from marriage are similar to laws banning interracial marriage that were struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court. A brief by the New York County Lawyers Association and the National Black Justice Coalition makes similar arguments.

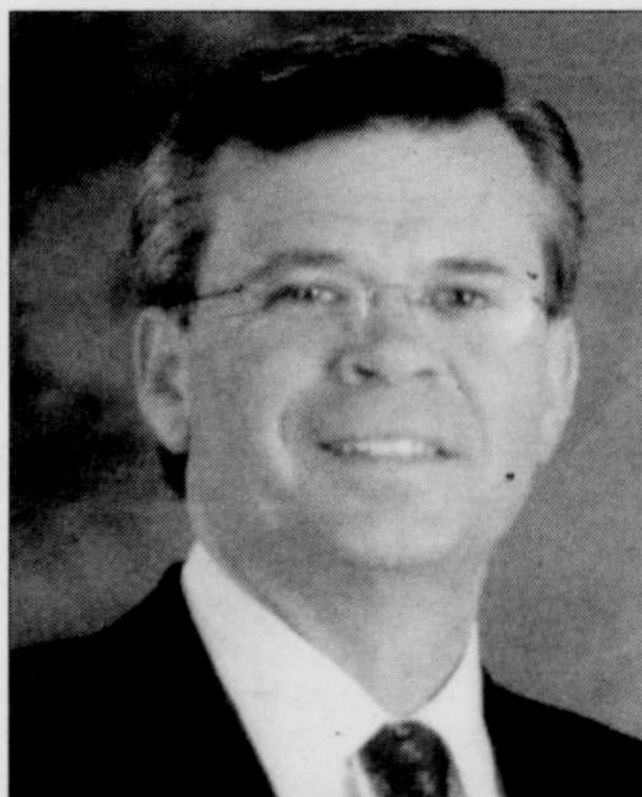
Nearly 200 religious organizations, congregations and clergy from throughout the state also filed a brief pointing out that there is broad support among religions for marriage for same-sex couples while acknowledging that allowing same-sex couples to marry will not force religious groups that do not wish to marry same-sex couples to do so. Religious groups signing the brief include Episcopal, United Methodist, Presbyterian, Church of Christ and Unitarian churches and Conservative and Reform Jewish temples.

KENTUCKY Governor's Anti-Gay Stance Bad for Business

Activists and business leaders in Kentucky say they're worried that the hostility of Gov. Ernie Fletcher's administration to gay causes might frighten away companies wishing to do business in the state.

"Bigotry is bad for business," Alan Hawse, vice president of information technology for Cypress Semiconductor, told The Associated Press. The California-based company has offices in Lexington.

According to Hawse, two decisions taken by the administration in the past month illustrate the stance he feels sends the wrong message to investors. In one case, Fletcher removed wording protecting homosexuals from an executive order barring discrimination by the state. In another, the Kentucky General Assembly went ahead with plans to give \$10 million to a private university that, despite the protests of rights advocates, expelled a student for being gay.



Gov. Ernie Fletcher might drive away business in Kentucky.