

BY RYAN J. PRADO

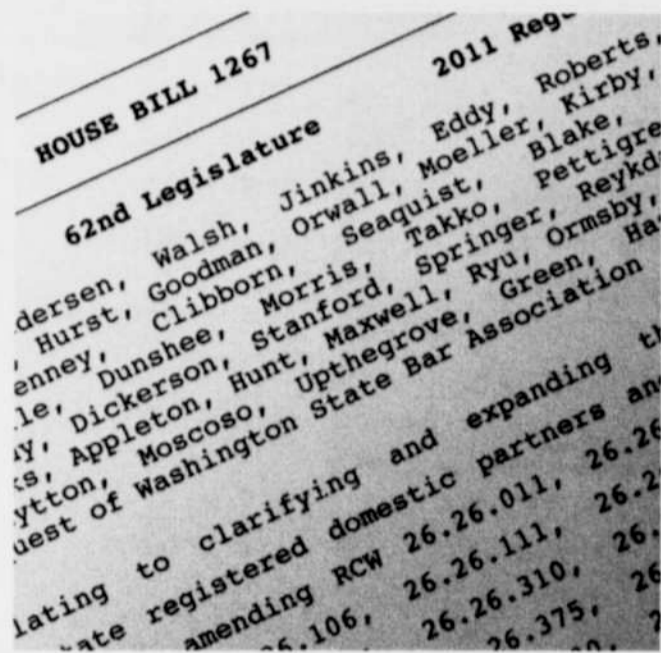
Equality Legislation Makes Headway in Washington State

While February's introduction of marriage equality legislation awaits moves in both the Senate and House in Washington State, gay rights activists have in the meantime set their sights on a trio of other progressive equality bills gaining momentum in Olympia.

On February 28, the House passed HB 1267, a bill introduced by Democratic Rep. Jamie Pedersen (43rd District). The bill is designed to amend the existing Uniform Parentage Act by recognizing domestic partners with the same rights and responsibilities as heterosexual couples in child matters. The bill also establishes standards for surrogacy contracts by allowing for compensated surrogacy in Washington state. Ty Stober, vice chair of Equal Rights Washington, reports that conservatives in Washington have targeted the compensated surrogacy portion of the law rather than attacking the rights and responsibilities the updated law will give same-sex parents.

"We very much support compensated surrogacy," says Stober. "It is an important issue for us so gay couples aren't forced to go out of state if they want a biological child."

A hearing was held March 15 for HB 1267 in front of the Senate Committee on Government Operations and Tribal Relations & Elec-



tions, but no votes are scheduled at this time.

Vancouver lesbian couple Erinn and Jen Havig testified before the House and again March 16 in front of the Senate in favor of the bill. Erinn and Jen had a baby, Abby, in September 2010—Erinn carried the couple's child from Jen's egg. But Washington law recognized Erinn, not Jen, as the child's parent, prompting a five month-long process wherein Jen had to adopt her own biological child.

"This type of legislation would allow for children that are born into a domestic partnership to be adopted by the other parent without the arduous process of state and federal background checks, adoption home studies, medical exams and court proceedings which cost an additional amount of money,"

explains Erinn.

In other equality legislation news, on March 2 the House passed an inflated anti-bullying bill introduced by Rep. Marko Liias (D-21st District). HB 1163 would require that a task force be set up to report to the legislature on a number of important issues that are not addressed in current law.

"Creating a statewide working group on bullying and harassment will help us identify the next steps the state can take to improve school safety," explains Rep. Liias. "The working group will gather experts to recommend these next steps—things like best practices, recommended curriculum for schools and better teacher preparation."

Liias reports that the bill also directs the state education agency to prepare a classroom-based assessment on mental health and suicide prevention for use in middle and high schools.

"This is one concrete step that will help teach students how to cope with the effects of bullying, while the state works to prevent the problem in the first place."

A public hearing on HB 1163 was held in the Senate Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education as *Just Out* went to press.

Similarly, the passing of HB 1649 on March 4 in the House exemplified a growing influence by the LGBTQ caucus and its allies in Washington state politics. Introduced by lead sponsor Rep. Laurie Jinkins (D-27th District),

the bill concerns the recognition of valid same-sex marriages from other jurisdictions as state-registered domestic partnerships.

"We remain positive that these bills will move out of committee and be approved by the Senate," says Stober.

Legislative moves on Democratic Sen. Ed Murray's (43rd District) marriage equality bill in the state Senate, and Democratic Rep. Jim Moeller's (49th District) House companion bill, according to Stober, are still a couple of weeks away.

Equal Rights Washington holds Equality Day Tuesday, March 22 from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. in Olympia to lobby in support of these three important bills.

Just Out will follow the progress of these LG-BTQ equality bills in Washington state. For more information on Equal Rights Washington, visit equalrightswashington.org.

Pride NW, Saturday in the Park Choose 2011 Themes; Red Dress Gets Fitted for 11th Year

Pride Northwest has unveiled its 2011 Portland Pride Parade and Festival theme. "Make It Happen!" according to the Pride board, was chosen for its relation to change in the LG-BTQ community coming from the ground up. "With our 2011 theme, 'Make It Happen,'

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