

The Final Countdown

Basic Rights Oregon gets ready to bring marriage equality to the ballot

BY ERIN ROOK

On the heels of the recent passage of marriage equality in New York, Basic Rights Oregon is amping up its activism in preparation for victory in Oregon.

"In terms of the timeline, we're essentially working from the same plan we've been working from for the last three years," says Basic Rights Oregon executive director Jeana Frazzini, "which is to continue to do the work both on the ground and through paid communication and advertising to engage people in the conversation about the importance of marriage equality."

But that timeline is approaching a critical decision-making point. By this fall—October 31 at the latest—BRO will decide whether or not to put marriage equality on the ballot for 2012.

"We really are in a very unique position as a state that has had so many ballot measure fights," Frazzini says. "But it's never been done before."

Frazzini doesn't want to take that step unless she is confident the measure will pass, and right now, there's still work to be done.

"We're absolutely moving public opinion in the right direction and, in fact, accelerating the pace of change," Frazzini says. Still, "we're not where we need to be yet—if the election were held today, it's not clear that we would win."

It would be irresponsible to go to the ballot

without a clear path to victory, she says, citing Maine's failed marriage equality initiative.

"In 2009 in Maine they had polling showing 48 percent support," Frazzini says. "On election day they won 48 percent of the vote."

According to figures released by Public Policy Polling in June, Oregon currently sits at that same 48 percent mark. While 11 percent of those polled were unsure, there's no guarantee that the undecided would side with marriage equality instead of against—assuming they even vote.

Still, there's time to move the dial. Support for same-sex marriage has increased by about 5 percent since voters approved Measure 36, the constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage, 57 percent to 43 percent. Frazzini says there's no

better time of year to make an impact.

"The next three to four months are absolutely crucial," she says. "This is the best time of year to be out engaging the public in conversation, asking folks to continue to support the campaign financially. We'll do another round of advertising this fall. That will be a part of the work to move public opinion on the issue."

But blazing a path to victory is about more than changing public opinion. Even if the public supports marriage equality with their words, it takes a well-run campaign to turn those kind thoughts into votes.

"Everything is headed in the right direction, but before we make the decision to go to the ballot, we want to be looking at strong majority support."

—JEANA FRAZZINI,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BRO



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