



Lifting barriers

As co-directors transform Basic Rights Oregon, they remain committed to putting LGBTQ issues 'front and center'

COURTESY OF BASIC RIGHTS OREGON

Nancy Haque, left, and Jeana Frazzini lead Basic Rights Oregon. The nonprofit recently opted to employ co-directors instead of a single executive director.

BY JARED PABEN
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Advocacy group Basic Rights Oregon sees this as a “transformational moment” in the fight for equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people.

Gay marriage is legal in Oregon and 36 other states, and the U.S. Supreme Court will rule on a case in June that could bring marriage equality to the entire union — or it could prolong the fight. At the same time, discrimination persists, and day-to-day life doesn't always align with the aspirations of legislation.

“We have so many of these overarching legal protections aimed at addressing the barriers for LGBTQ people to fully participate and find dignity and respect and safety and support in every community in Oregon,” Basic Rights Oregon co-director Jeana Frazzini said in a recent interview. “And yet, what's happening on the ground and the lived experience of LGBTQ people is still very far from the ideal and from the promise of those laws.”

For its next chapter of advocacy, the Portland-based nonprofit organization is also in the midst of changes. It recently opted to employ co-directors, instead of one executive director. Frazzini, who served as executive director since 2008, has been

joined by co-director Nancy Haque, who brings expertise in organizational development in a social justice advocacy context.

A new strategic plan will direct Basic Rights Oregon to focus on LGBTQ youth, people of color, those living outside of Portland and transgender Oregonians, steps the organization sees as necessary to ensure the community feels equality, not just reads about it.

“We're thinking at Basic Rights Oregon about all the folks who have been sort of pushed to the margins for a long time in the LGBTQ movement and thinking about how we can center them in our work,” Haque told me. “Really thinking about how we not only put their issues front and center but how we move our base to see how those issues are central to our collective liberation.”

Jared Paben: *The Supreme Court recently denied the petition from the National Organization for Marriage challenging gay marriage. I was hoping you could reflect on the victory in Oregon and then, as well, talk about the upcoming Supreme Court decision for other states.*

Jeana Frazzini: The news ... was that the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the

petition from the National Organization for Marriage challenging the federal district court decision in Oregon that confirmed the freedom to marry. It's interesting because it came just one week before the Supreme Court (would) hear arguments in a couple of cases that will impact the issue more broadly, outside of Oregon. It was exactly a year from the oral arguments that we had here in Oregon, as well, so timing was interesting. It wasn't a surprise that the Supreme Court refused to consider their petition. Every step of the way, the National Organization for Marriage has been turned back by the courts. They represent few, if any, Oregonians and were found every step of the way to have no standing to intervene in the case. But it is reassuring to know that the case here is settled. (On April 28), the Supreme Court (heard) the oral arguments in the marriage case. It's impossible to speculate what the outcome will be. I think the highest hope for this case is that it will once and for all affirm the freedom to marry for all couples in the United States and will finally put an end to a complicated, confusing and difficult patchwork of laws that exist right now, where you have 30-some states with the freedom to marry, some with no recognition at all, others with domestic partnership laws at the local level. Ultimately, no matter where you live or