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Fred Meyer

What's on your list today?

LOCAL NEWS

Public Service Denied

Ambridge Center won't rent to black gay support group

BY OLIVIA OLIVIA
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

An application to rent the Ambridge Event Center in Portland from a black gay support group has been turned down because the owner of the facility has a religious objection, a rejection that appears to violate Oregon's public accommodation laws.

The Portland Black PFLAG (formerly Parents, Friends, and Family of Lesbians and Gays) chapter now finds itself searching for a new venue while considering legal action and a formal complaint with the Civil Rights Division of the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries.

Located next door to the Oregon Convention Center, the Ambridge Event Center is owned by the Holy Rosary Catholic Church, which is

also located in the same northeast Portland neighborhood.

Despite advertising itself as "indefinitely flexible, warmly accommodating" for meetings and conferences, Ambridge Center managers said they have a contract with the church that prevents them from renting to people related to the LGBTQ community.

"If it was for the Ambridge itself we would host the event no problem. We love having all sorts of events here. This is just strictly because of our contract with our church doesn't allow us to host this event," an Ambridge official wrote to the group in a Feb. 13 email.

The organization wanted a big enough venue to seat and cater to a party of over 250 guests for their anniversary scheduled for mid April. Khalil Edwards, one of the coordinators for the organization, said the event might have to be postponed if they cannot find another suitable venue by the end of the week.

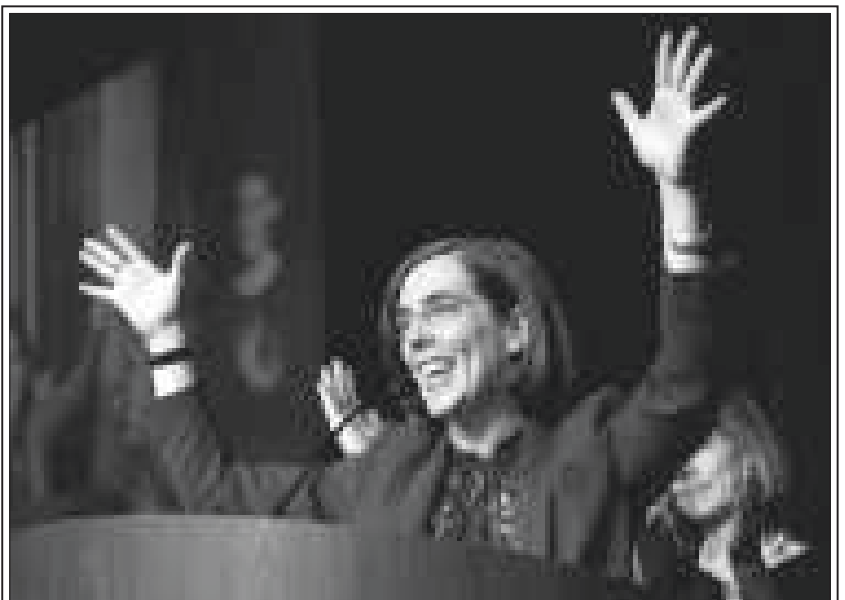
Rev. Vincent M. Kelber of the Holy Rosary Church confirmed that the church had a management con-

tract with the Ambridge Center but could not comment on the details of that contract.

As the first African-American PFLAG group in the nation, the Portland chapter focuses on supporting, educating and creating advocacy for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people and their immediate families, providing opportunity for dialogue about sexual orientation and gender identity, and supporting acts to create a society that is healthy and respectful of human diversity.

Charlie Burr, who manages media for the Bureau of Labor and Industries, said he could not comment directly if this was a discrimination case, but indicated that it may violate the Oregon Equality Act in which no person can be denied access to housing or public accommodation.

There are exceptions for religious organizations, but they are narrow, he said, indicating that an investigation would be necessary to determine further action, including possible fines and other penalties.



Poised to Become Governor

Oregon Secretary of State Kate Brown, pictured in an archive AP photo, is scheduled to be sworn in to office Wednesday as Oregon next chief executive at the State Capitol in Salem. Gov. John Kitzhaber is stepping down amid allegations over influence peddling. See story, page 8.