

## ACTIVISM

Youth Manifest  
at Visibility Day

MONTPELIER — Morning came early for many students and organizers attending Queer Visibility Day at Vermont's statehouse last month. Groups traveled from as far away as New Hampshire, Brattleboro and Bennington to meet legislators, share information and to be recognized on the assembly floor. Student groups from Burlington and Montpelier were also represented. All told, younger people representing the LGBT community outnumbered their elders by a wide margin.

The gay-straight alliance group from Bennington High School sported black sweatshirts printed with white, that read



Rep. Helen Head of So. Burlington chats with organizers at the statehouse

service organization that serves Sullivan and Grafton counties in New Hampshire and Orange and Windsor counties in Vermont.

Connie Beal and Clark Sheldon from SafeSpace fielded questions about upcoming events in April, and Nicole Lukas attended from the Coalition for a Tobacco Free Vermont. Lukas spoke briefly at a meeting of the groups,

asking them questions.

Kara DeLeonardis, executive director of SafeSpace, asked Rep. Bill Lippert if something could be done to stop Sweeney, but Lippert said there are no rules against picture-taking at the statehouse.

Sweeney had planned a press conference at the statehouse, which was later cancelled.

"I want to thank the young people for coming to this and wearing your wonderful T-shirts ... you do a great job of representing us."

— ROBYN MAGUIRE, VERMONT FREEDOM TO MARRY TASK FORCE

"Live to Love" on the front, and "Glow Up/Gay Lesbian or Whatever/United People" on the back. The students said their school board initially resisted the idea of the shirts, but they persisted and the board finally agreed.

Representatives of several organizations squeezed into a corner room next to the statehouse cafeteria, offering free information to legislators, a few of whom stopped to chat.

Some expressed dissatisfaction about the size of the room for organizers to set up displays, and about the small number of legislators who stopped to talk. Others were pleased at the chance to get to know each other and to network. One organizer noted that many legislators were not at the statehouse that day because they were just coming back from a week's break.

Rep. Helen Head of South Burlington was one of the handful of legislators who stopped to talk as others filed into the cafeteria. Rep. Bob Kiss, just days before elected mayor of Burlington, also stopped to say hello.

Rob Larabee of the Vermont Gay Men's Chorus offered information about the group's events, including their concert for legislators in late March.

Paul Brogan, Acorn's executive director and Jennifer Lupton, Vermont case manager for Acorn, were there representing the AIDS

emphasizing that "queer youth are affected at astoundingly high rates" of smoking.

Mid-morning, groups and organizers filled guest chairs at the front of the House chambers and lined part of the public seating in the back. Rep. Jason Lorber, one of several openly gay legislators, read a welcoming statement and recognized each LGBT group present by name. Legislators applauded the groups as they stood to be recognized.

Only one detractor appeared, taking pictures and exhibiting a sign from the balcony. A security officer took away the sign, which is against the rules on the assembly floor.

Mike Sweeney, of Crown Point, New York, protested Visibility Day because "I believe homosexuality is a sin and is going to be the ruin of America, among other things," he told OITM. He said he attends a weekly prayer meeting at the Maranatha Church in Williston and often comes to the statehouse.

Shortly after the recognition of Visibility Day on the floor, student groups and others gathered for a meeting with advisors. Lluvia Mulvaney-Stanak and Kate Jerman, co-directors of Outright, expressed concern for safety of the young people attending the event. Students said Sweeney followed them around the statehouse that morning, taking pictures, and that some young people with him were

"This speaks to why we have to have this day," said Robyn Maguire, field director for Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force. "I want to thank the young people for coming to this and wearing your wonderful T-shirts ... you do a great job of representing us," she said, adding their presence "countered this guy with his hateful message."

Organizers also discussed ways to gain equal rights through working with elected representatives.

Jerman noted that there is a lot of controversy about H.865, the Gender Identity Bill, and how its passage would affect schools. The idea that male teachers would then show up wearing dresses is used as a scare tactic, she said. A Burlington High School student said school officials don't know what nondiscrimination really means and that it isn't well enforced. Teachers need training, the student said.

Virginia Renfrew, lobbyist for Equality Vermont, discussed the issues surrounding how state education funds are to be spent, and the tobacco tax was also discussed. Mulvaney-Stanak said it's especially important for citizens to bring issues to their legislators and tell them how they are personally affected by state laws.

"What really hits home is when they hear your messages," she said. ▼

## POLITICS

Vermont House Passes  
Gender Identity Bill

MONTPELIER — Vermont's transgender citizens are one step closer to receiving equal treatment under the state's laws. Legislators finally pushed the dusty Gender Identity and Expression bill through on March 1st, passing easily on a voice vote after a year of sitting in the judicial committee.

Prior to its passage, the bill was renamed and given a new number with added language regarding people with disabilities. The former H.478, "Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Expression" was changed to H.865, "An Act Relating to Non-discrimination." The added language has since been removed, leaving the act itself unchanged.

Rep. Bill Lippert of Hinesburg introduced the bill to the floor of the House in late February. A small crowd of transgender citizens and their allies attended, with hopes that the bill would soon pass out of the House and on to the Senate for consideration. The House passed the bill the following day.

Lippert said while introducing the bill that it would "add clarity" to Vermont's laws, which already have gender identity included in classes protected under hate crimes law.

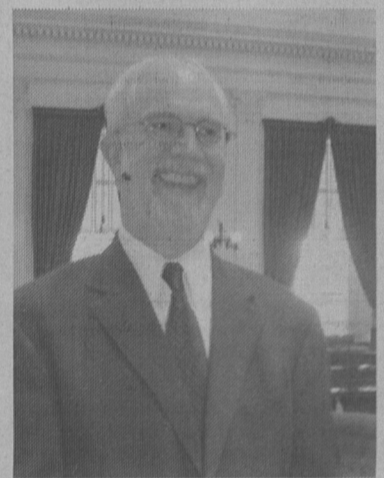
People who are transgender are often targets of violence and discrimination, he said. One example occurred in 2003 in the town of Hardwick, where a police officer was treated in a discriminatory manner after his employers learned of his earlier transition from female to male. The attorney general agreed with the officer that he was discriminated against, and a settlement was reached including a fine being paid and the town agreeing to training.

Recently, the states of Washington and Maine have added similar language to their laws, Lippert said. Now eight states plus 76 cities and counties nationwide have included language in their laws outlawing such discrimination, he said.

Also, IBM, one of Vermont's largest employers, and 80 of the Fortune 500 companies have adopted similar antidiscrimination policies, as have UVM and Middlebury College.

"Some say we don't need to do this," Lippert said, "but if we're able to make this clear ... it's an important thing for us to do."

Only one legislator spoke in opposition to the bill. Rep. David A. Sunderland of Rutland Town questioned the process by which the bill appeared on the floor and wanted to know if anyone had testified against the bill. No one



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— REP. BILL LIPPERT  
(HINESBURG-D)

asked to testify against the bill when testimony was taken last March and April, Lippert said. Sunderland said someone had told another committee member they wanted to testify against the bill. No one asked to testify against the bill and no one was denied the opportunity to testify, Lippert said. "I was unaware of it until today," he said. Sunderland also wanted to know how long the committee debated the bill before bringing it to the floor, saying "we've talked a lot about open government" and expressed dissatisfaction that the debate lasted a couple of hours.

Sunderland asked for a roll call vote to have the matter recommitted to the judiciary committee. The House voted his proposal down, 39 to 90. The bill is now in the Senate, where a first reading of the bill was held March 3. ▼