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ARKANSAS

Ruling Opens Doors for Foster Children

The Arkansas Supreme Court struck down a state child welfare regulation adopted in 1999 that denied gays or homes including a gay household member from serving as foster parents, the American Civil Liberties Union announced in June.

The ACLU, representing a group of prospective foster parents, challenged the regulation the same year it was instituted.

The decision upholds a 2004 Pulaski County Circuit Court judge's decision that there are "no reasons that health, safety, or welfare of a foster child might be negatively impacted by living in a foster home where there is a gay person present," the ACLU reported.

LOS ANGELES, CA

Actors Urge Others to Help End Black AIDS Epidemic

Actors and humanitarians Danny Glover and Harry Belafonte, speaking during the 2006 BET Awards Ceremony, called for African Americans and specifically celebrities to join the national Mass Black Mobilization Movement to end the AIDS epidemic in Black America.

Glover, a longtime AIDS activist and humanitarian, made his comments while helping to present Belafonte with the BET Humanitarian Award during the show held at the historic Los Angeles Shrine Auditorium.

"Following the example of the man we are honoring this evening, let us remember that we are in the 25th year of the HIV/AIDS epidemic," said Glover, a previous BET Humanitarian and one of BET's 25 Heroes in the Struggle Against AIDS. "Please join with BET's Rap-It-Up and the Black AIDS Institute to create a mass mobilization where we all do our part to end this pandemic."

DALLAS, TX

Protesting Military Inclusion of Hate Groups

In response to an article appearing in the July 7th issue of the *NY Times*, Jim Maloney, Executive Director of MEA released the following statement:

"While the military actively recruits from the ranks of Aryan Nation and neo-Nazis to meet recruitment goals, millions of LGBT Americans continue to be denied the right to serve and hundreds

more are discharged from service simply because of their sexual orientation," said Jim Maloney, MEA's executive director. "It's time our elected officials stop playing games with our national security by allowing outdated and fictional fears to trump the needs of our nation. We call on all members of Congress to join with the American people in supporting repeal of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' by passing the Military Readiness and Enhancement Act."

MEA is a new national volunteer grassroots mobilization of veteran, military, LGBT and allied communities cooperatively engaged in securing the right of all Americans to serve in our nation's armed forces free of discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

UNITED KINGDOM

6,800 Couples Married

As of early July, nearly 7,000 same-sex couples have married under the U.K.'s Civil Partnership Act, which took effect in December, *in newsworthy* reported.

Male couples outnumbered female couples by a wide margin in England and Wales: 4,311 to 2,205, the news report said. Male couples also led the number of marriages in Scotland, 220 to 123.

The new law provides same-sex couples with the same marriage rights of heterosexual couples, *in newsworthy* said.

"Local registrars have been exemplary in introducing this new legislation, helping same-sex partners to have a relaxed and happy experience on their important day," the news report quoted Scottish Registrar General Duncan Macniven.

HONOLULU

Correctional Facility Harassed Youth

The American Civil Liberties Union announced a \$625,000 dollar settlement in the first case in the country to specifically address the treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth in juvenile facilities, the ACLU reported. The June settlement ends an ACLU federal civil rights lawsuit on behalf of three young people who faced anti-gay and anti-transgender abuse and harassment at the facility by staff and their peers.

"What has happened here in Hawai'i should put juvenile systems nationwide on notice," said Tamara Lange, a staff attorney with the ACLU's Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Project. "If other states don't take decisive action to stop anti-gay and anti-transgender abuse and harassment, then they can expect to have to answer for it in court as well."

vermont news

NEWS

Clouds and Silver Linings

News on the Marriage and Family Fronts

BY BETH ROBINSON

Win some, lose some - these are the ebbs and flows of a civil rights movement. We've taken some hits recently, no question about it. But the news isn't all bad. We have every reason to be angry - and optimistic.

On July 6, in a 4-2 decision, New York's highest court rejected a constitutional challenge to the exclusion of same-sex couples from civil marriage. The court concluded that since heterosexual couples can conceive children in casual relationships (an unlikely scenario for gay couples), the State has a special incentive to give heterosexual couples an inducement to maintain stability (i.e. marriage, and the accompanying social, economic, and legal protections). Plus, though it acknowledged that there is not any actual evidence that children raised by same-sex parents are worse off, the court expressed its "intuition" that children are better off with a father and a mother.

Chief Judge Judith Kaye dissented strongly, expressing confidence that "future generations will look back on (the) decision as an unfortunate misstep." Rejecting the suggestion that the ability to procreate is a prerequisite to the right to marry, she noted that elderly couples who cannot procreate can marry, and many same-sex couples do have children. And Judge Kaye recognized that "the exclusion of same-sex couples from the legal protections incident to marriage exposes their children to the precise risks that the State argues the marriage laws are designed to secure against."

Ironically - and this is good news - the New York court issued its decision the very same week that the American Academy of Pediatrics (hardly a bastion of liberal activism) affirmed once again, in a thorough assessment of 25 years of research, that "there is ample evidence to show that children raised by same-gender parents fare as well as those raised by heterosexual parents."

On the basis of such evidence, on June 29th of this year, the Arkansas Supreme Court struck down a 1999 regulation that

excluded gay people and heterosexuals with gay household members from serving as foster parents. In its unanimous decision, the Arkansas high court, in contrast to New York's, actually considered the evidence, concluding, "the facts demonstrate that there is no correlation between the health, welfare, and safety of foster children and the

blanket exclusion of any individual who is a homosexual or who resides in a household with a homosexual." The State's argument to the contrary, the court said, "flies in the face of the evidence." The Court found that the exclusion was based not on children's welfare but rather on "views of

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NEWS/LOCAL

StoryCorps Comes to Town

BY LYNN MCNICOL

BURLINGTON — StoryCorps is a national project to instruct and inspire people to record each others' stories in sound. The shiny airstream StoryCorps bus, which provides a place for people to record their life stories, will be taking up residence in Burlington, from August 3rd to the 27th.



A rendering of the StoryCorps mobile booth. COURTESY OF STORYCORPS.NET

A project of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and National Public Radio, StoryCorps started out with stationary StoryBooths in New York City in 2003, and last year launched two MobileBooths, one touring the Western United States, and the other the East.

The mobile booths are equipped with recording equipment and space for three people: two participants, normally an interviewer who is usually a friend or relative of the person being interviewed, and a facilitator.

While the MobileBooth East is parked in Burlington, anyone in the area is invited to participate. StoryCorps provides assistance with interviewing, including a list of suggested questions to ask in the interview. The 40-minute format results in a CD that the participants can take home for a suggested donation of \$10.

The project works directly with the local NPR station which will broadcast several of the locally recorded stories. StoryCorps has recorded thousands of stories, many of them already broadcast on NPR, and has garnered wide praise.

"StoryCorps is history in the richest sense of the word," Studs Terkel was quoted by the project. "It is a bottom-up history, history that will make people feel like they count. Nobodies become somebodies. In this world today, people feel helpless. They feel like robots. But once they speak of their lives, they realize that they count!"

All of the recorded stories will also be kept on file at the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress. ▼



For more information about StoryCorps, see www.storycorps.net or contact StoryCorps at 646-723-7020.