

1LBOR
23
997

Anti-Discrimination Bill in VT Senate

This is the new year, 1988 and Vermont's 30 member State Senate will hear new legislation regarding civil rights for lesbians and gay men. The bill, whose lead sponsor is Harvey Carter (D-Bennington), is basically the same bill which moved slowly through the Vermont House last year. The House Bill (H-247) is laying dormant in the House General and Military Affairs Committee. The Senate Bill (not yet numbered) is accumulating co-sponsors. At this time both Sally Conrad (D-Chittenden Co.) and Phillip Hoff (D-Chittenden Co.) are co-sponsors and more sponsors are anticipated.

As a new bill, this legislation will be introduced and then sent to committee. The Judiciary Committee, chaired by Mary Just Skinner, is most likely to be given the bill to work on. It must be voted on in committee, passed on to the full Senate and voted on there before it can move on to the House. All this must happen before the legislative crossover date at the end of January.

The need for this bill is demonstrated by recent studies of discrimination and violence against lesbians and gay men. Last year's study in Vermont indicated that 44% of the lesbian and gay men responding have been fired, 25% have been evicted or denied purchase or rental of housing, and 80% have been subjected to harassment and

violence because of sexual orientation. A study of bias crime recently released by the National Institute of Justice, a division of the U.S. Department of Justice, concludes, "homosexuals are probably the most frequent victims" of hate-motivated violence (see related story).

The Senate Bill would extend the protections of the non-discrimination clauses of 12 Vermont laws to everyone regardless of their "sexual or affectional orientation." Vermont law currently protects against discrimination based on race, sex, age, religion, national origin, marital status, or handicap in the areas of jobs, housing, public accommodations, and credit.

Supporters of the measure see passage in the Senate as very possible. "I think that we can make a strong showing with this bill. I think we have a good chance of passing it in the Senate," said Tim Mazur, ACLU legislative director. Sally Conrad spoke optimistically about the Bill at a recent UULGC meeting in Burlington (see related article). Opponents, however, are in evidence. Michael Bernhardt (R-Londonderry) was quoted in the Burlington Free Press, saying, "if there were a pressing need, the Legislature would have acted."

Still, as the new year begins and with it a new Legislative Session, public support

(Continued on page 3)



March on Washington, October 1987. Marchers, like M.L.King Jr., dream of civil rights.

New NIJ Report on Hate Crimes

The Advocate

A federally commissioned report has concluded that "homosexuals are probably the most frequent victims" of hate-motivated violence and are targeted for assault, verbal intimidation, and vandalism more often than are blacks, Hispanics, Southeast Asians, and Jews.

The study, which deals with bias crimes against minority groups and the response of the criminal justice system, was prepared by Abt Associates, a private consulting firm, for the National Institute

of Justice (NIJ), a division of the Department of Justice. It amounts to the first confirmation in federal government literature of what gay organizations have been saying for several years: that violence against lesbians and gay men is a serious - and growing - national problem.

"I take it as an enormous affirmation of the value of the work we [in the gay community] have been doing," commented David Wertheimer, executive director of

the New York City Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project. "It's a confirmation that the problem we've been talking about is as real as we've been saying it is, and finally people outside the gay community are admitting it. One of the most respected...think tanks in the nation has stated that addressing antigay and antilebian violence should be a national priority. That's exciting."

Echoing gay community criticisms, the study declares that the vast majority of

(Continued on page 8)

more articles on Gay Rights inside this issue...