

Politics

Civil Rights Bill Update

The Civil Rights Bill will be introduced into the legislature once again this biennium. The Vermont Coalition of Lesbians and Gay Men will be holding Steering Committee meetings to help chart the course of this bill. Information on other bills of interest will also be passed on at these meetings. The Steering Committee meetings will be held on Tuesday evenings at 7:00 p.m. at the A.C.L.U. office on State Street in Montpelier.

It is vitally important that our community be aware of what is happening in the House and Senate chambers. Even publishing monthly, *Out in the Mountains* cannot keep us as up to date as we will need to be. Anyone unable to get to a Steering Committee meeting should call one of our liaisons on Wednesday evenings to be brought up to date on the progress. (Phone numbers for the liaisons, Holly Perdue and Keith Goslant, are listed on the Resources Page.)

While the Civil Rights bill will be our top priority this session, we also need to

watch for other bills of interest. You should begin now to maintain ongoing communications with your senators and representatives. A phone call or letter to them on any issue that is important to you is a start. Then calling or writing for their support on the Civil Rights Bill won't be so difficult later.

Some Helpful Lobbying Points

Below are some facts that you can use in discussing the anti-discrimination bill with your local Senator or Representative:

- Discrimination is a problem in Vermont. The issue is not whether one's sexual orientation is "right," but whether discrimination is tolerable! No person should be denied a job, a home, an education, or the use of a public place because of his or her sexual orientation.

- This bill does nothing to "promote" homosexuality or bisexuality. People can support this bill and retain their personal views or beliefs about homosexuality or bisexuality. This is a *civil rights* anti-discrimination bill.

- Over 90% of all sexual offenses involving children are committed by adult

heterosexual men. There are laws and regulations that cover misconduct by all persons, whatever their sexual orientation, including criminal laws against child molestation. This bill would not change any such law or existing age of consent statute.

- Supporting this bill is not a political liability. No legislator who has supported civil rights for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people has ever been defeated on this ground alone.

- Vermont has a long tradition of protecting equality for all of its citizens. The state constitutionally prohibited slavery before any other state. Our advocacy for civil rights is no different from the struggle against bigotry and ignorance that African Americans have fought in the South.

- Bear in mind that most people do not know that rights for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are unprotected by either state or federal law.

- This bill does not create new laws or grant "special" rights to homosexuals. It amends existing anti-discrimination statutes by adding "sexual orientation" to the protected categories already named (i.e. race, religion, gender, national origin, handicap, age, etc.).

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