

Out in the Mountains

established in 1986

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To Submit Articles and Letters

We encourage and implore our readers to do what they can to make *OITM* a paper both for and by gay, lesbian, and bisexual Vermonters. Please assist us by typing your articles and letters double-spaced and including your name and phone number in case we have any questions. Your submission should be received by *OITM* no later than the 1st of the previous month. **Thank you for helping out!**

Editorial

Our focus this month is the push to lobby for our civil rights; passage of H-162 and S-131; bills to add sexual orientation to the categories covered under 15 Vermont statutes that protect citizens against discrimination in the areas of employment, housing, public accommodations, education, credit, and insurance.

The gay, lesbian, and bisexual community has been working since 1986 to try and pass some version of this bill and as Keith Goslant writes in this month's cover story, **the time is now**. Whether it is the more blatant discrimination in hiring and firing that keeps many of us closeted, especially those working in the fields of education and child care, or the more subtle things we don't think about until they arise, such as insurance or credit, we all suffer from the denial of our rights.

Passage of H-162 and S-131 will not right all the civil wrongs we live with, but it is an important start. With legislation in place, successful legal challenges to discrimination can create fundamental case law necessary for the protection of our rights. (Read in the National News section this issue about the successful case in Massachusetts, prosecuted by the Massachusetts Human Rights Commission).

In addition, the current bills do not include changes to statutes regarding family law/child custody, a topic that was felt too controversial by the sponsors. We still have a long way to go both nationally and on the state level to make it possible for our families to receive the same civil rights as any other Vermont family.

Paula Ettelbrick of the Lambda Legal Defense Fund likens our situation today to that of blacks and women in the early 70's. We are just beginning to see legislative and case law changes that protect our civil liberties. While we have seen how hard it has been to move from legislation to real changes, we need the legislation as a starting point. In New York City teachers are suing the New York City Board of Education for the right to include partners in health benefit plans. This challenge comes five years after the passage of New York State's gay rights legislation. This past summer, the judge ruled favorably in the first step in that case, saying that the teachers claim of discrimination on the basis of marital status and sexual orientation had merit. (Ettelbrick points out that health care is generally a sizable portion of many employees benefit package and that denial of coverage to those who can't marry their partners is not only discrimination but also an equal pay for equal work issue.)

Keith Goslant says it best in the close of his article urging all of us to work for the passage of H-162 and S-131, "As lesbians, gay men and bisexuals we have made lasting contributions to the diversity, creativity and unique quality that is Vermont. It is time for our contributions to be acknowledged and our voices heard. The time for our full civil rights is now!"

Deborah Lashman ▼

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