

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, Inc.

is a support, education and advocacy organization.

Founded in 1981 by 25 parents, PFLAG now services approximately 70,000 members and speaks for thousands of others. PFLAG affiliates are located in more than 400 communities in this country and overseas.

PFLAG is a tax-exempt, non-profit organization that is not affiliated with any political or religious institution.

Mission Statement

PFLAG of Greater Providence, an affiliate of PFLAG, Inc., is dedicated:

to the preservation of families in loving relationships,
to educating an ill-informed public about homosexuality, and
to the attainment of full civil rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people and their families.

Our Meetings are held on the **first Tuesday of each month** from 6:30—8:30 p.m.

At The Providence Center, 520 Hope Street (off Doyle Avenue), Providence.

Confidentiality is assured. All are welcome, especially family members of g/l/b/t people, beginning or having successfully completed their journeys to understanding and acceptance, as well as g/l/b/t/ who wish to understand and support family and friends.

Chapter President: Myra Shays

Editor: Carol-Anne Villanova

For further information or directions:

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PFLAG NATIONAL

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Web site: <http://www.pflag.org>

June / July / August 2001

Special Note About Summer Meetings

Our chapter will not meet in July, because the Second Tuesday of July falls on the eve of Independence Day. See you on Tuesdays, August 7 and September 4, for our regular meetings at The Providence Center, 6:30 to 8:30 pm

JUNE 16 IS RI GAY PRIDE DAY

Our Chapter Will Participate in the Festival, But Not the Parade

Although our chapter has joyfully marched in the last three Gay Pride Parades, this year we have voted not to march because it is now a night-time Parade. Large, well-endowed Parade entries can afford floats and lighting. We can't, and if we marched in the dark no one would see us.

BUT -- THERE IS STILL A WAY WE CAN SHOW PRIDE IN OUR CHILDREN, AND SOLIDARITY WITH OUR G/L/B/T FRIENDS -- AND SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT WHAT PFLAG DOES FOR THE PARENTS WHO NEED US.

The Pride Festival , with entertainment, music, food, crafts vendors and information booths, will run from Noon until 8:00 p.m. at the park across the street from the Providence Place Mall. We have reserved a table from which we will distribute literature and tell people about PFLAG's work. If you would like to sit at the table with another member for an hour or so, doing this important outreach, please call the chapter number (751-7571). Or sign up at the June 5 chapter meeting.

Remember that Pride Day will be your only chance to get your PFLAG "fix" for the summer, because there will be no chapter meeting in July (as indicated above).

REP. CICILLINE GIVES PFLAG A SCOOP

At our April 3 meeting, RI Rep. David N. Cicilline (D. Prov.) announced for the first time in public that he will run for the Mayor of Providence in 2002. This will almost surely entail a primary battle, but he is confident of major support. Rep. Cicilline also gave us the insider's view of two pieces of legislation that were then coming to a vote in committee: The civil unions bill, which he co-sponsored and drafted; and the same-gender marriage bill. Unfortunately, both bills died in committee in the week following Mr. Cicilline's PFLAG appearance, but sponsors were gratified by the amount of support the proposals received and will probably re-introduce them in some form in the future.

At our meeting Mr. Cicilline described coming out to his not-very-surprised parents just before The Providence Journal published a profile of him a couple of years ago. He had frankly acknowledged to his interviewer that he was gay, and confirmed the fact when the paper called him twice after the interview, asking if he really wanted to disclose that -- as if were something shameful he'd rather hide! Then -- figuring he ought to let his parents know what was being published -- he had a talk with them. The family lovingly took it all in stride.

Mr. Cicilline says he was pleased that, when he was running for his seat in the House, many conservative religious people who he assumed would vote against him seemed unconcerned about his orientation. They supported him for what he stood for. He also described his current proposal for a "diversity officer" in every school, to whom students could go in confidence if they feel discriminated against for any reason, including being perceived as gay.

We thank Mr. Cicilline for coming to speak to us, and for the work he does on behalf of our children. Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

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**When you no longer need PFLAG...
PFLAG needs you!!**

Please volunteer to help at one of our meetings or with chapter duties!!

NEWS FROM OUR CHAPTER

- Thanks to the following members, who brought refreshments to recent meetings: Barbara Metz, Eileen Gray, and Mary Horan.

-Barbara and Myra “manned” the PFLAG table at the April 21 Health Fair at the Salvation Army Community Center on Broad Street, sponsored by several agencies and the Brown University Medical Students Society.

- Barbara and Roy and two Tiverton PFLAG members were interviewed on *The Tommy Rocket Show*, shown on the Public Access Channel. Mark generously taped the show, and you may borrow it at any chapter meeting.

- ELECTIONS: June, the anniversary of our Chapter, is election month. The following officers are on the slate: Myra Shays, President; David Sweet, Treasurer; and Barbara Metz, Secretary. Board members are to be Myra, David, and Barbara, plus Gwen Howard and Carol-Anne Villanova. If you would like to join the Board, please call the Chapter number.

MAKING SCHOOL SAFER FOR GLBT STUDENTS

At our May 1 meeting, Mimi Coughlin, the insightful, energetic Director of the Safe Schools Institute of Rhode Island, had us imagine that we were a group of school teachers and administrators for whom she was giving a seminar -- which she often does. She called on some of us to read aloud the actual words of gay students who have been verbally and physically attacked in school. She disclosed that sometimes the cruel attackers are not punished, but the victim is forced to attend a different school. Or the victim's pleas are simply discounted or ignored. Remarkably, sometimes the taunts and insults actually come from staff, not only from the gay students' peers. And she assured us that discrimination based on sexual orientation is just as illegal in schools as is discrimination based on religion, race, national origin, or disability.

Once the schools are aware of these facts, they can take steps to make schools safe. Thanks to the Safe Schools Institute, improvements have been made. Schools are appointing diversity officers in whom students can confide. School Gay-Straight Alliances are organizing in increasing numbers. Preliminary research at the Brown University School of Public Health seems to show that, where Gay-Straight Alliances are active, teen suicides are reduced.

We salute Mimi Coughlin for the excellent work the Institute is doing to ensure a positive, inclusive atmosphere in schools, where all students can learn and thrive in safety. If you have a child (gay or straight) -- or if you are on the staff -- in a school where Safe Schools training would be useful, please call Mimi at 421-5626.

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OUR OWN GWEN HOWARD TESTIFIES

A bill to add equal rights protection on the basis of gender and gender identity has been passed out of committee in the RI House of Representatives and is expected to be favorably considered by a Senate committee. The Rev. Gwen Howard, an active member of our chapter, courageously spoke in favor of the bill before the House Health, Education and Welfare Committee. What follows is part of her testimony.

[While renting an apartment with my spouse] I was on hormone replacement therapy and was known as “Gwendolyn” by everyone everywhere -- except at work. I couldn’t afford for our landlord to find out, so I would get into the car in the morning and somewhere along the way change clothes and appearance so that I could get by at work; then every night on the way home I would have to find a place to “turn back into” Gwendolyn.

[I had legally changed my name] but the State Registry of Motor Vehicles refused to record my sexual identity as female. They said it was needed for “proper identification.” How, exactly, are they doing that? I had to go through my day with a driver’s license that says “Gwendolyn Howard -- Male.” With that license, can you imagine what kind of cell I would be put in if, God forbid, I were arrested for anything? I don’t even want to think about it.

If I had a choice, I would not have testified. Having to “out” myself, opening up intimate details of my life is a very unpleasant thing. But I realize just how high the price sometimes is for simply being yourself. I lost my career in the parish ministry. People I know have lost jobs, family, friends. Too many have lost their lives. If it takes being open to keep this from happening to others, then that’s what I need to do.

News From All Over...

PARIS -- The new Mayor of Paris is Bertrand Delanoë, a Tunisian-born fifty-year-old Socialist, the first openly gay mayor of a major international city. He had campaigned mainly for honesty in government, and against pollution and corruption, and his orientation did not seem to have been a factor in the race.

SUSSEX, ENGLAND -- The police department is encouraging minority groups within the force, including gays, to form networking associations, saying that the networks “are the key to celebrating diversity in the workplace.”

GERMANY -- The Bundestag has officially apologized to gays who were imprisoned by the Nazis. Until 1969 the Nazi-Era Penal Code banned kisses, caresses and smiles between gay men, and it is believed that up to 10,000 gays were sent to concentration camps.

BEIJING -- China’s psychiatric association has removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses, saying “Many homosexuals lead perfectly normal lives.” This brings China closer to W.H.O. policies and the American Psychiatric Association, which took the step nearly twenty years ago.

IOWA -- The *Des Moines Register* now has a page called “Celebrations”, which will include weddings between women and men and legally sanctioned same-gender civil unions; and will continue to publish news of anniversaries for couples who have been legally married fifty years or longer.

MASS. -- Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America, a mentoring organization nearly a century old, has quietly welcomed gays as volunteers for decades, despite a widely held notion to the contrary. Citing overwhelming data, the organization believes gays are a much lower risk than heterosexuals for sexually abusing children. Big Brothers of Massachusetts, the largest of the nation’s 50 locally autonomous agencies, now has over 1000 active relationships between men and fatherless boys; many of those relationships are between boys and gay men. The volunteers go through a stringent background check and disclose much personal information to the mothers of the boys, including race, religion, allergies, tobacco use, and sexual orientation, and a mother can reject the match for any reason.

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Join Us! Become a Member of PFLAG/Greater Providence!

Student/Limited Income \$15
Household \$30
Individual \$25
Newsletter only \$10
Add'l Contribution \$_____

Send checks payable to PFLAG/Greater Providence to: PFLAG, c/o Apt. 212, 500 Angell Street, Providence,
RI 02906

Name (s): _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ E-mail: _____

CIVIL UNIONS -- WHAT FOR?

For me, fighting for gay couples to be able to enter into civil unions is the same as other issues to which I have dedicated my energies as a social worker and a legislator. They speak to a basic right of access....

By denying the rights of gay individuals to enter into legally recognized permanent relationships, we diminish ourselves even as we seek to devalue others. There is no moral, ethical, religious or other rationale that can justify such behavior.

I invite those who seek justice -- who have ever had a child, grandchild, parent, sibling or friend who is gay, or who know for themselves the results of oppression, to join me and the co-sponsors of my bill to help Rhode Island become a more just and compassionate place. We'll all be the better for it.

*Condensed from a statement by
Rep. Nancy Hetherington (D. Dist. 28),
who lives in Cranston with her partner, Elaine Martin*

WHAT DO GAYS DO TO A NEIGHBORHOOD?

This is part of a recent letter
published in *The New York Times*

Researchers at Carnegie Mellon University found that the Number One predictor of a city's or a region's likelihood of success in the new economy was the concentration of gay people living there. I believe this is true not just because many gay people are talented, committed, productive and, yes, sometimes even great neighbors. But the study says a lot about the non-gay majority of these cities, who have sent a message of welcome, put legal protections into place, and made sure that their community is one where people of diverse backgrounds can contribute and feel included.

Evan Wolfson
Senior Staff Lawyer,
Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund