

ACLU joins gays in struggle for equality

Lesbian/Gay Rights Project announced

The American Civil Liberties Union today announced plans to establish a new project aimed at ending discrimination against gay men and lesbians.

The Lesbian/Gay Rights Project, located in the ACLU's national office in New York, will begin by challenging state sodomy laws that criminalize homosexuality and attacking the various forms of discrimination that these criminal laws engender.

ACLU Executive Director Ira Glasser and ACLU President Norman Dorsen said that with the creation of the project the ACLU would be able to take a more aggressive and visible role in fighting for equal rights for gays and lesbians.

"Gay men and lesbians confront laws and government practices that would long ago have been struck down as unconstitutional if they applied to racial minorities or women," Glasser said. "Laws in twenty-four states and the District of Columbia that outlaw consensual sodomy are used as the legal justification for various forms of discrimination, and force gay men and lesbians to choose between suffering second class citizenship or keeping their sexual orientation a secret from the world."

"As long as civil rights for gays and lesbians remain a gay people's issue alone, it will be too easy for gays to be isolated in their struggle to secure equality," Dorsen added. "Antiquated sodomy laws restrict the civil rights and liberties of many Americans, and permitting such discrimination to continue threatens the civil rights of all Americans."

Eradication of sodomy laws

The first priority of the ACLU Lesbian/Gay Rights Project will be the eradication of sodomy laws. Sodomy laws are used as the legal basis for police harassment of gay men, and to justify differential treatment of lesbians as well as gay men in housing, employment, and domestic relations (e.g. child custody) cases. Even where sodomy laws are not vigorously enforced, their mere existence defines gay relationships as a crime, perpetuating common myths and stereotypes about gay men and lesbians, and inhibiting gay people from living openly.

The ACLU, with the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, has already filed a legal challenge to the Louisiana sodomy law. The ACLU is now exploring the possibility of bringing similar challenges in Arkansas and Minnesota.

The gay rights project will also target discrimination against gay men and lesbians in housing and employment—with emphasis on education and the uniformed municipal services (police, firefighters, etc.). In addition, the project will pursue several cases in which local laws interfere with gay people's First Amendment rights, including laws barring gay teachers from "advocating" homosexuality in the classroom.

The ACLU Lesbian/Gay Rights Project is a result of strategy meetings of the national Ad Hoc Task Force to Challenge Sodomy Laws. This task force, organized in 1983, consists of the national ACLU, several state ACLU affiliates, Lambda, the Lesbian Rights Project, Gay & Lesbian Advocates and Defenders, Texas Human Rights Foundation, the National Committee for Sexual and Civil Liberties, and National Gay Rights Advocates.

Cooperation with Lambda

The project will work closely with Lambda to assure that there is no duplication of effort, and to avoid diverting contributions from other gay rights groups. Overall litigation priorities and strategies will be developed in consultation with an advisory board now being formed. The board is expected to include such leading gay rights activists as Jay Kohorn, Roberta Achtenberg, Leonard Graff, Tim Sweeney, and Abby Rubenfeld, in addition to several members of the ACLU Board of Directors.

The ACLU said it would require \$50,000 to begin the project and was now actively seeking contributions.

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Charitable Remainder Trusts How to contribute to the ACLU's future

By Gwen Ragsdale Madrid

Everyone at the ACLU is proud of the victories we have won in the defense of civil liberties, and are encouraged by our friends and contributors' steadfast support, which has made these victories possible. Our past victories, however, do not guarantee civil liberties for all time. That is why each generation must do its part to pass on the Bill of Rights intact for future generations.

The ACLU Foundation, the tax-deductible arm of the ACLU, recently established a Planned Giving Department to help ACLU members and contributors provide for the long term defense of civil liberties while obtaining significant tax benefits for themselves and their families. Encouraged by federal and state tax laws, you can contribute to the ACLU Foundation in ways that permit you or another beneficiary to receive income from your gift for life. These are called life income plans.

In the last year, for example, one of our supporters—Robert Rose of Fremont, California—took advantage of such a life income plan. In the following letter to ACLU Associate Director Carol Pitchersky, he explains how creating a charitable remainder unitrust (one of several life income plans) lowered his income taxes, increased his income, and provided long term support to the ACLU Foundation.

Dear Ms. Pitchersky:

I recently learned of and took advantage of a plan ACLU has that may be of interest to others in a situation similar to mine.

Having lived through the bleak days of McCarthyism, when a crazy terror gripped the country, and the ACLU was one of the very few institutions that retained an amount of sanity, I wanted to do something for the organization. Not being an Earl Warren or an Alexander Meikelojohn, but rather a garden-variety type of citizen, I wondered what significant contribution I could make.

I then learned of the unitrust agreement ACLU provides in which I decided a piece of real estate to ACLU Foundation, thus avoiding a significant capital gains tax, and benefitted from a charitable deduction which lowered my income taxes for several years. In addition, ACLU pays me a quarterly sum, based on the value of my gift, until my death, which is more than the real estate was generating.

To make the contribution even more attractive, a second beneficiary, selected by me and following my demise, will be paid a similar amount until she dies.

I now enjoy an amount of satisfaction in knowing that my interest in the Bill of Rights—including the right to disagree with the majority—has a kind of perpetual life.

Sincerely,
Robert Rose

Other supporters have followed Mr. Rose's example. The ACLU Foundation offers life income programs tailored to our supporters' individual and family financial needs. Several types of gifts made in trust to the ACLU Foundation enable you to provide life income for yourself (and others) and receive income tax benefits now—and estate tax benefits later. The best plan for you depends on your unique circumstances. We would like to tell you and your advisors about the various ways to benefit yourself and the ACLU Foundation.

Life income plans and bequests support and strengthen our foundation, and in turn create a Legacy of Liberty, preserving civil liberties for generations to come. You can support the ACLU by planning a charitable bequest.

Please call or send the form below to:

Gwen Ragsdale Madrid
Planned Giving Director
ACLU Foundation
132 West 43rd Street
New York, New York 10036
Telephone # (212) 944-9800

A Legacy of Liberty

I am interested in creating a Legacy of Liberty guaranteeing civil liberties for generations to come.

Please send me information on the following:

- ☐ Making A Will
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Name: _____

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Best time to call: _____

Gifts to the ACLU Foundation are tax deductible.