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Home
Local News
National News
World News
News Briefs
Opinion
Columns
Arts
Calendar
Events
Classified Ads
Voice Personals
Bar Guide
Community Guide
Press Releases
Wedding Planner
Pride Events
Wedding
Announcements

OPTIONS
Message Boards
Back Issues
Search

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Home > Local News

Struggle for marriage equality moves to Connecticut

GLAD files suit for couples denied licenses

By Ethan Jacobs

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Advocates for same-sex marriage moved their battle to a new front Aug. 25, filing a lawsuit against the state of Connecticut on behalf of seven same-sex couples seeking marriage licenses.

The couples are represented by Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders (GLAD), Maureen Murphy of Murphy, Murphy, Nugent in New Haven, Kenneth Bartschi of Horton, Shields and Knox in Hartford, and the Connecticut Civil Liberties Union (CCLU).

"Marriage is both a profound personal commitment and unique legal relationship that provides enormous protections to families," said GLAD Civil Rights Director Mary Bonauto in an Aug. 25 statement. "As a simple matter of equality, it is time for Connecticut to end this discrimination against same-sex couples and their families."

The couples were all denied marriage licenses in Madison, Conn. Named as defendants in the suit are the state Department of Public Health, which supervises marriage registration, and Dorothy Bean, Madison's registrar of vital statistics. The lawsuit was filed in New Haven Superior Court.

There is no state law explicitly banning same-sex marriage in Connecticut. Attorney General Richard Blumenthal released a statement in May explaining that state law does not permit same-sex marriage. The state does allow the domestic partners of state employees to receive coverage under their partners' health insurance and pension plans.

Owing to Bonauto's expertise, GLAD already has a track record of winning same-sex marriage cases in New England. In 1999 the organization served as co-counsel in the Vermont Baker case that ultimately led to that state's civil union law. GLAD's most recent victory

came with November's Goodridge ruling, which paved the way for same-sex couples to legally marry in Massachusetts.

As in the two prior cases GLAD has chosen plaintiffs with compelling personal stories. The couples have been together for between 10 and 28 years, and five of them have children. Several of them have faced health crises, and GLAD says the couples worry that if they are not married they may be denied access to each other in the hospital.

The plaintiff couples are: Beth Kerrigan and Jody Mock of West Hartford; Janet Peck and Carol Conklin of Colchester; Jeffrey Busch and Stephen Davis of Wilton; J.E. Martin and Denise Howard of Stratford; Barbara and Robin Levine-Ritterman of New Haven; John Anderson and Garrett Stack of Woodbridge; and Geraldine and Suzanne Artis of Middletown.

GLAD is currently litigating another marriage case in Massachusetts, seeking to overturn the 1913 state law forbidding out-of-state same-sex couples from marrying in the Bay State. Two of the plaintiff couples in that case reside in Connecticut. A Suffolk Superior Court judge recently denied the plaintiffs' request for an injunction to prevent the state from enforcing the 1913 law until that suit is resolved.

Ethan Jacobs is a staff writer at Bay Windows. His e-mail address is ejacobs@baywindows.com.

Comments, criticism or praise regarding this article or writer -- or just about any other subject of interest to the lesbian and gay community -- are always welcome.

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