

Gay-rights ordinances targeted

Two groups seek repeal of laws under merger

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Their reasons are different, but two newly formed groups have the same goal: repeal of the city and county gay-rights ordinances under the merged Louisville/Jefferson County Metro Government next year.

The Pro-Family Coalition of Jefferson County held its first rally this month, and plans to endorse a slate of candidates in the weeks to come.

The second group is being organized by Metro Council candidate Jeffrey Klusmeier, a Republican running in District 23, who says the ordinance is unfair to business and is unnecessary.

Those metro candidates who join his bipartisan coalition will be asked to sign a pledge saying they support repeal of the gay-rights ordinances, and would also back the issue being decided by voters through a referendum. The group is planning a news conference for May 7 and a rally on May 14 at Christ Apostolic Church gymnasium, Klusmeier said.

Broadened by the Board of Aldermen in 2001, the city ordinance bans discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment, housing and public accommodations. Louisville and Jefferson County have adopted nearly identical ordinances, and under merger rules, the county ordinance will apply to the metro government. The Metro Council, which takes office in January, has five years to pass its own version of the ordinance before it lapses.

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C-FAIR, the political action group of the Fairness Committee, which supports the ordinances, has been polling and interviewing the candidates on a variety of issues, including the ordinance. It recently endorsed candidates in 18 of the 26 council races.

"We don't take this law for granted. We know we are going to have to get good candidates that will support it," said Dan Farrell, a C-FAIR board member. "If merged government is going to be a step forward we can't then go and take a step backward by

repealing this law."

Both opposition groups say they were prompted to organize after the leading Democratic mayoral candidate, Jerry Abramson, stated that he supports the existing ordinance and would veto the council's attempt to repeal it.

Klusmeier termed Abramson's decisions to break his silence on the issue "a strategy" aimed at rallying Democrats behind a local cause and giving them the ammunition to demonize Republican candidates who may not support the ordinance.

"Abramson is throwing down the

gauntlet, and we have to respond to it," Klusmeier said.

Susan McNeese Lynch, Abramson's spokeswoman, denied that his comments were part of a Democratic maneuver, and noted that Abramson is not endorsing a slate of Metro Council candidates.

"When he spoke he was speaking purely of his own position," she said. "There is no strategy."

Hayes said his group thinks that Abramson remained silent on the ordinance for so long out of political self-interest.

The Pro-Family coalition held a protect outside a community forum

held by Abramson on Thursday at the Sun Valley Community Center. They plan a rally on May 21 at a similar Abramson event scheduled at Ballard High School.

Republican council candidate Chris Smrt, who is running in District 10 and attended the Pro-Family coalition's protest, thinks the ordinance will become a bigger issue in the general election campaign, when groups on both sides begin trying to shore up support on the council.

"It will be the battleground issue for the November election," Smrt said.