

Gay-rights protesters say YMCA is unfair

Demonstrators urge family memberships for same-sex couples

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The Courier-Journal

Carrying signs that asked, "Y Discriminate?," about 80 people protested outside the YMCA in downtown Louisville against the local policy that denies family memberships to same-sex couples.

The Fairness Campaign, which organized the demonstration, also began asking members of the Greater Louisville YMCA to sign petitions supporting a policy change.

Gay and lesbian couples now must pay \$26 more a month because they must buy two individual memberships.

"People were unaware of the issue," said Jeff Rodgers, a Fairness Campaign coordinator.

Among the protesters was Aletha Fields, 33, a Louisville teacher who pulled her two sons out of YMCA activities after learning that she and her sons and her partner would not be eligible for a family membership.

"I was outraged, really," Fields said, adding that she was disappointed that "we're not good enough for a family membership."

The issue came to light in January when a gay couple complained after being denied a family membership, prompting the YMCA to form a six-member committee to re-examine its policy.

"We think they've been dragging their feet," Rodgers said.

But Steve Tarver, YMCA president and chief executive officer, said in a telephone interview last night that the organization is gathering information from various boards.

"We intend to do this diligently," Tarver said.

Paul Campion, 36, his partner Randy Johnson, 34, and their 7-year-old twins, Tyler and Tevin, were among those who demonstrated outside the YMCA.

"We do not intend to have our family sitting in the back of the bus," Campion said as he addressed the crowd through a bullhorn. The policy that denies them a family membership is "narrow and offensive," he said.

In an interview, Campion said the family is boycotting the YMCA, which means the boys aren't participating in summer sports.

When the boys learned of the family-membership policy, Campion said, Tevin remarked that "they're not playing fair."

Johnson said they normally aren't activists, but because of the "direct impact it (the policy) has on our children," they had no choice.

Carol Uebelhoer, of Otisco, Ind., shared a letter she addressed to Tarver, withdrawing her family membership. Uebelhoer said she and her partner, Jo Ann Dale, have been together for 24 years, and their daughter is 6 years old.

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"Unaware of the YMCA's discriminatory 'family' definition, we purchased a Metro Family membership," her letter said. The couple have withdrawn their membership.

Uebelhoer suggested that the YMCA adopt a policy that defines a family as two adults and children at the same address.

YMCA staff previously granted family memberships to some homosexual couples, although Tarver has said the couples got them by mistake. Gay couples who had already received family memberships can keep them, officials have said.

Mike Lyall, 48, a construction manager who had just finished a workout



BY DURELL HALL JR., THE COURIER-JOURNAL

Aletha Fields said "I was outraged" to learn that she and her sons and her partner would not be eligible for a YMCA family membership.

at the YMCA, said he supported the Fairness Campaign's demonstration.

"It's been talked about inside the Y," Lyall said. "It should be open to everyone — absolutely."

But Ashley Overstreet, 20, of Louisville, said the YMCA is a Christian or-

ganization, and "the Bible doesn't agree with gays and lesbians."

"They're fighting a lost cause," said Overstreet, who added that she has nothing against gays and lesbians, but that the demonstrators are simply "looking for an argument."