

METROPOLITAN TIMES

Glendening makes personal plea before judiciary panel

rites brother in seeking special protection for homosexuals

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ANNAPOLIS — Maryland Gov. Parris N. Glendening took the unusual step of going before a General Assembly committee yesterday to ask its members to extend civil rights protection to homosexual persons.

The Democratic governor's personal appearance before the House Judiciary Committee was the first time he has made a direct personal appeal to a legislative panel since he took office in 1995. And he told lawmakers it was largely a personal grief that brought him there.

His brother Bruce Glendening served in the U.S. Air Force — including three voluntary tours of duty in Vietnam — from high school until he discovered he had the virus that causes AIDS, Mr. Glendening told the committee.

Mr. Glendening said on one of his last visits to see him, his brother said that although he hurt much he couldn't bear for anyone to touch his skin, it was more difficult to have to leave the career loved.

"This has weighed on me a long time," Mr. Glendening said. "I think, how sad — not that he died, but that he lived in fear" that someone would discover he was homosexual.

"I'm here to ask that we make this state a fair and more just society," Mr. Glendening concluded to the applause of proponents, many of whom were wearing rainbow colored "diversity" buttons.

But Delegate Emmett C. Burns Jr., a black Baptist minister and Baltimore Democrat, said he was concerned that adding special protection for homosexuals could hurt efforts to protect the civil rights of black persons in Maryland.

"I'm not convinced the Maryland Human Relations Commission has the capacity or that it has completed its responsibility [to black persons] who have filed complaints," Mr. Burns said. "I'm worried their complaints will be put aside because of the slew of new complaints that will surface."

Delegates Sheila Hixson and Leon Billings of Montgomery County — among 37 Democrats co-sponsoring the bill — said more staff could be added to the com-

mission if warranted.

"Every one step we've taken [for women or minorities] has been made against the charge that we didn't have resources," Mr. Billings said.

Mr. Glendening's legislative director, Joe Bryce, said states that have enacted similar statutes have seen a 1 to 3 percent increase in caseload.

About half of the state's population already lives under such laws, Mr. Glendening noted, because Montgomery, Prince George's and Howard counties and Baltimore city have extended their civil rights protections.

Mr. Glendening announced last month he would try to make it unlawful to discriminate against people in employment or housing because of their sexual orientation, or someone's perception of it.

Maryland law already prohibits such discrimination based on race, creed, sex, age, color, national origin, marital status, and physical or mental handicap.

The bill would make it a crime to harass, injure, restrain or intend to "substantially harm" the physical or mental health of anyone be-



Gov. Parris N. Glendening appears before a House committee to seek support for his bill to bar discrimination against homosexuals.

cause of gender or sexual orientation.

The bill would exempt churches in personnel matters for church-related, nonprofit activities.

The governor did not testify before a Senate committee considering the measure late last month.

Mr. Glendening's staff said his

decision to testify yesterday was not an indication that he thinks the bill does not have enough support to become law.

But Delegate Carol Petzold — a Montgomery County Democrat, Judiciary Committee member and co-sponsor — said she has "grave concerns" that the bill can pass the whole General Assembly.