

NATIO

Massachusetts panel backs pro-gay programs in schools

Pushes homosexual 'youth pride' march in Boston

By Cheryl Wetzstein
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Massachusetts, already a leader for state-protected homosexual rights, is advancing its campaign to fight hatred of gays with sessions in public schools.

The state also is sponsoring today's first annual Gay and Straight Youth Pride March in Boston.

But some parents and family advocates worry about the truthfulness of the school programs and are fighting back with a "parents' rights" bill.

This week, the Christian Coalition urged passage of a national "Parental Rights Act" as part of its "Contract With the American Family."

In 1992, Republican Gov. William Weld signed an executive order establishing the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth to combat violence, harassment and discrimination against and suicide among young homosexuals.

Mr. Weld has often been mentioned as a possible GOP presidential or vice-presidential candidate. He said in February he would not join the 1996 race.

His commission encourages schools to enact policies to protect homosexual teens, teach staff members about suicide prevention, and offer school-based support and counseling groups.

The commission also advocates public consciousness-raising.

"We envision thousands of gay and straight youth and their supporters marching through the streets of Boston in the first gay youth pride march ever," states a letter signed by leaders of the commission's Youth Committee, which is the lead sponsor of today's rally in Boston.

Parents are fighting back with a bill to protect their rights to raise their children free of interference from school policies.

Co-sponsors include dozens of homosexual school youth groups, community organizations, the Boston City Council and state departments of Public Health and Education.

Newton, Mass., parent Brian Camenker disapproves of such state and school advocacy.

"Many educators in Massachusetts think their mission is to liberate children from the narrow-minded and ignorant views of the parents in order to solve broad social problems," said Mr. Camenker, who also heads the Interfaith Coalition in Newton.

He and other parents have been pushing a bill to protect parents' rights to raise their children without being circumvented by school policies. A bill passed the state Senate, but only after being "watered down," he said.

To build a case for a tougher bill, Mr. Camenker has been compiling a list of anti-parent incidents, such as the 14-year-old student who called her father a "homophobe" after attending "Homophobia Week" at school.

This week, the Hampshire Regional School District in Westhampton, Mass., hosted a dozen sessions about how "the prejudice of homophobia hurts everyone."

Parents of students in grades

7-12 received a letter in April announcing the May 16 and 19 events with Warren J. Blumenfeld, author of "Looking at Gay and Lesbian Life" and editor of "Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price."

The letter noted that attendance at the student programs was voluntary and included an opt-out form. The letter also invited parents and other interested parties to attend a preview presentation.

His message was "so foolish, so fake, so false," said Leslie Pasquini, a nurse and family advocate from Springfield, Mass.

The presentation played on the audience's sympathies and guilt about how homosexuals are mistreated but failed to mention any of the health risks of homosexual behavior, she said. Mr. Blumenfeld also reiterated the disputed figure "that 10 percent of the population is gay," she said.

Even more troubling, Ms. Pasquini said, was Mr. Blumenfeld's not-so-subtle comparison of the "theocratic right" with German Nazis. The message, she said, was that what the Nazis did to the Jews in the Holocaust is what the religious right is doing to homosexuals, bisexuals and "transgendered" people.

The next day, school committee member Margaret Walden attended one of Mr. Blumenfeld's sessions with about 40 seniors.

Mr. Blumenfeld asked them "whether they had seen positive gay role models on TV or in the media" and emphasized that homosexuality is a "normal variation" in life, Mrs. Walden said.

The 10 percent figure was mentioned, she said, but nothing was said about the "theocratic right" or Nazis. Asked about the students' reaction, Mrs. Walden said, "They didn't seem to buy it."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ RENTAL CAR CLEARANCE CENTER ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

New NAACP