

The Maine LGBT Civil Rights March

May 28-30, 2010

Three Days. Thousands of People. Millions of Possibilities.

Introduction:

In November, nearly 53 percent of the near-record turnout of almost 570,000 voters rejected the equal marriage legislation signed by Maine Governor Baldacci on May 6, 2009. Titled Question 1, this voter-enacted referendum took away the rights, responsibilities and recognition that had previously been granted by Maine's Legislature and its Governor. Once again the rights of a minority group were decided upon by the general population. It was the thirty-first time in just over a decade that the LGBT population had been stripped of the civil right to marry their same-sex partners and the fourth time in just twelve months.

Members of the LGBT community and their allies realized they could not wait until the next elections to demand the equality guaranteed them under the 14th Amendment. Concerned activists from Maine and beyond began discussing the next steps. Out of these discussions emerged ideas for an LGBT Civil Rights March. It seemed appropriate to start with Maine, the most recent of our losses, a reminder of the struggle we face in attaining full federal equality under all matters governed by civil law

In the months since its inception, Mainers from around the state emerged to add their voices, their support and their suggestions. They decided to converge on Augusta, the capital, during the Memorial Day weekend and rally in Capitol Park, directly below the State House in an event filled with speakers as well as musicians and other performers. Our demands of full equality will be heard throughout the state, the region, and the nation

What makes this March different and truly remarkable are the grassroots events in the days preceding it. The organizers realize that the LGBT people and allies of Maine, still aching from their Election Day loss, need to express themselves in the independent and diverse spirit of their heritage. Whether they choose to arrive in a caravan of automobiles and motorcycles or on bicycles or on foot, Mainers will be invited to organize state-wide coordinated events that will put faces on the friends, neighbors, families and children whose civil rights were snatched away in November. It is our hope that these well-publicized rallies, parades and caravans will work to change hearts and minds by reminding voters we are sons and daughters and nieces and nephews. We are their doctors, their teachers and their grocery clerks. We are their neighbors, their friends and their children.

Dates: May 28 – 30, 2010

Maine's typically cool, damp climate is rather unforgiving for several months out of the year. Although these dates are more than six months after Question 1 passed, May tends to be a comfortable and cool month in Maine which makes the weather perfect for the planned activities. We selected Memorial Day weekend – Friday to Sunday– so people won't need to take much time off work. A handful of events are scheduled for Friday, but most take place on Saturday and Sunday which maximizes participation. Holidays tend to be slow news days, so our event will garner proper media attention for the struggle for LGBT equality. Memorial Day (May 31, 2010) has been planned as a day of networking and strategizing for those activists who wish to spend additional time in Maine.

A Call to Action

The true grassroots tradition allows people to pave their own way as opposed to the overly controlling top-down approach that some organizations utilize. We want our fellow organizers to create their own message in their own way. We send out this Call to Action to all Mainers and our out-of-state friends and allies. Our focus is on issues that matter to them right now in our fight for full equality – including the passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act, the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, the passage of legislation and implementation of court decisions that will provide marriage equality for citizens in Maine and every other state. We will address hate crimes victims from all communities; the seemingly endless battle with homophobia and transphobia; the need for safer schools which will protect all our children; the distressing separation of families under discriminatory immigration laws; and inclusive, comprehensive health care.

Events might include vigils for loved ones who have died of AIDS and hate crimes; seminars on LGBT equality in Yes-on-1 towns and cities; and LGBT family picnics. The possibilities are endless. We want Mainers to create their own events – vigils, rallies, concerts and demonstrations that bring to light the issues directly affecting us. Our website will be up shortly to provide a space for organizing and posting events. Groups around the country have expressed interest in implementing actions in solidarity. These "Kick-off events" are already in the works. As excitement grows, others will follow:

- On May 28, 2010, in Presque Isle, there will be a rally on the University of Maine campus where one of the Deans will be speaking. The campus's gay-straight alliance is participating.
- Also, on May 28, 2010, a group of cyclists from Northern and Eastern Maine will "Bike 4 Equality." They will follow a nearly 70-mile route along back roads to Augusta over two days.
- On May 29, 2010, individuals from the Lewiston-Auburn area will plan a similar event to those in Presque Isle. They will drive to one of the assembly places the next morning.
- Also, on May 29, 2010, people will gather at the Charlie Howard memorial in Bangor for a candlelight vigil, to remember victims of hate crimes in Maine and around the country. A rally is also scheduled to occur that same evening, and will include live music as well as speakers. The next morning, participants plan to decorate their cars and motorcycles, and follow a 75-mile route along back roads ("Cruising 4 Equality") to Augusta.
- As of the last week of February, other related events have been suggested for the cities and towns of Bar Harbor, Brunswick, Ogunquit, Portland, and Waterville.

Assembly Places and Marching

Groups from the Northern and Eastern parts of Maine will meet at Williams Park in Augusta roughly 1.5 miles away from Capitol Park, and groups from Southern and Western Maine will meet on Winthrop Street in Hallowell, roughly two miles from Capitol Park. Marchers will converge at the corner of State & Union Streets, adjacent to the State House. The distance will be slightly less than the route for the National Equality March – an easily manageable, roughly 60 to 90-minute March. Coordinators of the March are in contact with city officials in Hallowell and Augusta and all proper permits will be obtained.

The Augusta Rally: Our Message

Our message is clear: Equal protection for LGBT people in all matters governed by civil law in Maine and the rest of the 50 states. Now! This is a national event. It is certainly about LGBT equality in Maine; Maine is our platform. But it is also about full equality nationwide. Next door in New Hampshire the legislature may soon be combating a rescission of their new marriage equality law ; in Massachusetts, a bill combating discrimination against transgender people has remained stalled in committee; in Indiana the legislature may pass a ban against same-sex marriage and in Washington D.C., the U.S. Congress has failed to address three major pieces of pro-LGBT legislation - the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, and bills that would repeal both “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and the DOMA. It is urgent that we motivate the citizens of Maine and other states to continue to fight for the rights we deserve.

A number of seasoned and renowned speakers have signed up for the May 30 rally. We are reaching out to others, including sponsors of marriage equality legislation in Maine, leadership from pro-LGBT groups, local-level grassroots activists and celebrities who have been particularly vocal about their support of LGBT equality. Appropriate entertainment will also be featured.

Fundraising, Donations, and The Budget

One of the most difficult aspects of assembling any major event is raising the money to hold it. We expect a significant amount of assistance from national level activists and supporters here in Maine. In addition to personal donations, we will contact a number of businesses throughout Maine to ask for their support. The power of the internet allows us to reach tens of thousands of people; Twitter, Facebook, and our own blogs, as well as those of supportive friends, have revolutionized fundraising and participation. We anticipate that our website will be operational on or around March 1.

Any surplus funds we raise will remain in Maine and be given to one or more of our local non-profit endorsers to help in our continued fight for equality in Maine. We are working on a comprehensive budget, which will be published soon. We are researching involvement by various agencies providing fiscal sponsorship, so as to create a stable vessel for the funds used by the March as well as securing necessary legal representation and insurance for March functions. The ‘kick off’ events will be funded by the organizations that sponsor them. Our initial startup costs have been covered by donations. Logo and web design have been volunteered. We intend to keep our expenditures minimal.

Conclusion

We look ahead with optimism and hopeful enthusiasm. As people march, drive, and bike their way across the landscape of Maine, we know we will reach a significant number of people. We will talk to them; we will educate them and we will help them realize a change of heart. We are each of us just people seeking to be treated equally. By telling our stories, by putting our best foot forward, we seek to gain acceptance from our fellow citizens, here in Maine and nationwide. We have confidence that we will be granted equal protections under the 14th amendment. We have faith that the American sense of fair play will win out and justice will prevail.

There have been discussions about solidarity marches and similar Calls to Action nationwide. Your participation insures that there will be exponential progress in pro-LGBT outreach and education - not just here in Maine, but everywhere. We encourage your feedback and your input. We seek your support and endorsement and the endorsements of the organizations to which you belong. This is a grassroots effort – our success depends on the determination of committed individuals who are tired of being treated like second class citizens and our fair minded allies.

As it was with the National Equality March, we have the potential to reach millions of people with our efforts and our message. When it comes to the future of this new civil rights movement, the future of LGBT equality and the rest of our lives, we can certainly hope for and work toward millions of possibilities.

Please march with us in Maine.

If you or members of your organization are interested in endorsing the Maine LGBT Civil Rights March, or wish to contribute to its success in other ways, or if you simply would like to receive updates on the events in coming weeks and months, please contact:

*equalitynow@civilrightsmarch2010.org 207.619.3319
www.civilrightsmarch2010.org*

A list of sponsors and endorsers will be posted on our website.

Coordinators

Tania Chadbourne Hopkins – Portland, ME Nikalas Maciejewski – Downers Grove, IL
David Mailloux – Peabody, MA Mathew Martin – Augusta, ME
Samantha White – Presque Isle, ME

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