



How A Movement Works

Not long ago I was approached by someone at a fundraiser who was curious about what Lambda Legal's role in the movement is when there is new progress taking place in state legislatures. That's easy, I said: Our work becomes even more important.

It is an amazing time for the movement. A logjam has broken in legislatures across the country, and in the past couple of months we've seen a number of states adding protections for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people. But these laws are only as strong as the ability to enforce them, which is where Lambda Legal comes in.

Colorado, Iowa and Oregon have all passed laws banning discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, housing and public accommodations. New Hampshire passed a civil union bill and Oregon a comprehensive domestic partnership bill, making them state numbers five and six to offer same-sex couples the legal benefits that married spouses receive. Additionally, Washington State passed a domestic partnership bill giving same-sex couples some of the rights and benefits married spouses receive, while in New York, Governor Elliott Spitzer took the first step to make good on his campaign promise by introducing a marriage bill in the state legislature.

Better protections for more lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people are always good news. But it is crucial to have good court decisions right out of the gate to interpret these new laws. As always, Lambda Legal will litigate and file friend-of-the-court briefs, where necessary, to fulfill the promise of these laws. We will fight efforts by extremist groups to create loopholes that

might undermine them. And we will continue to offer our expertise — whether that means assisting legislators in crafting state laws, as we did in California and Washington, or helping people navigate the complications that arise from these laws, such as what happens when people with one status (marriage, civil union or domestic partnership) move or travel to a state that does not respect it.

Lambda Legal's cases and public education work also lay important groundwork for legislative advances. Whether we ultimately win or lose in a particular case, we provide living examples of people who need protections. Sharing our stories highlights the inequality many LGBT people endure and moves public opinion in our favor. In short, we help people see that there is a problem to be solved, and we frame the argument about what equality looks like. So it's no coincidence that Iowa, New York and Washington — three states where Lambda Legal and our partners have or had marriage cases — have all moved to provide stronger protections for LGBT people.

We are making great strides, but inequality persists. The good news is that as many as 20 states will soon have specific state laws against discrimination, including 12 that expressly prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender identity, and 10 states and the District of Columbia now provide some legal recognition for same-sex relationships. That's amazing. The bad news? The rest of the states still do not. We are energized to be part of this movement for equality during such a period of progress. We've got our work cut out for us in the courts and in legislatures, and Lambda Legal's role is as vital as ever.

KEVIN M. CATHCART
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR