



From Sea to Shining Sea: Equality

It's official. The summer of 2007 will go down as Lambda Legal's summer of equality. Just before Labor Day, our big marriage win in Iowa capped a string of victories that touched the lives of many LGBT people, people with HIV and their families. What's astonishing is the sheer breadth of America we covered — coast to coast from New Jersey to Washington State, sweeping through Oklahoma, Ohio and, of course, Iowa.

As a direct result of the New Jersey and Washington cases, a significant number of same-sex couples and their families are now eligible for health insurance they could not get before. Parents who legally adopted children in states across the country can now live or travel in Oklahoma without fear that their children will be considered strangers to them in the eyes of the law. And in two Ohio cases, courts sent strong messages that the state's antigay amendment could not be used to invalidate laws that protect the safety of unmarried couples or to deprive registered domestic partners of important health benefits for their families.

You'll read more about these cases in this issue of Impact. As you do, I ask that you keep in mind the geography.

In the early 1990s, when I became executive director of Lambda Legal, one of the first big decisions I was part of was how to grow the organization. We had recently opened our Los Angeles office to great success. The new outpost gave us direct access to West Coast communities; it also allowed us to hire people who were part of these communities and therefore were more intimately aware of the

issues affecting them. We decided to replicate this model and, within a decade, opened three more regional offices: in Chicago, Atlanta (which celebrates its 10th anniversary this month) and Dallas.

I've been thinking about our regional model quite a bit since an Iowa judge ruled that denying same-sex couples the right to marry violates the state's constitutional guarantees of liberty and equality. When we first started talking about a marriage case in Iowa, many people on the coasts were perplexed by the choice. But lawyers in our Midwest Regional Office had carefully analyzed the political and legal landscapes and determined that both could work in our favor. Moreover they understood that the state of Iowa has a long tradition of standing up for civil liberties. And so far they have been right.

Our attorneys and educators working across the country have been right quite a bit recently. But lest I paint too rosy a picture, remember that minutes after the Iowa ruling, extremist politicians — ignoring the role of courts in protecting individual rights — started calling for the judge's impeachment. And as we were going to press, the high court in Maryland ruled against marriage equality in the ACLU's challenge. These are the ups and downs of a civil rights movement — and they will continue until the promise of equality is truly fulfilled nationwide.

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