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M E M O R A N D U M

TO: LEGISLATION STRATEGY SUBCOMMITTEE
FROM: BARRY S. KOHN
DATE: JUNE 22, 1976
SUBJ: SOME IDEAS FOR OVERALL STRATEGY

I believe that if the Legislation Committee is going to be successful it must establish an overall legislative strategy including realistic goals, priorities, timetables, and the person(s) who will be responsible for each specific area. An overall strategy is important so that we do not handle each issue as it arises without realizing how it fits into an overall scheme. We should also know whether we have the person power to accomplish the task and whether we are taking people away from other more important tasks. This plan should cover a period of at least three years.

At the present time there appears to be two major pieces of legislation affecting gay people. They are:

1. The repeal of the sodomy statute, and
2. Enactment of an amendment to the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission Act to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in employment, housing, and public accommodations.

From our past experience it appears certain that both pieces of legislation will have a tough time before they are enacted. The legislature

as a whole is not educated about homosexuality and even the more liberal legislators are afraid to speak out on the subject. We need to have advocates who are willing to speak out on the floor of the legislature. Those kind of people will only come forward if they understand homosexuality themselves and can articulately answer the people who still believe all the myths.

I believe the need for education can not be underestimated if we are to succeed in the legislature and, therefore suggest that all of our efforts during the next year should be to educate legislators. Constant face to face meetings between the legislators and gay people to talk about homosexuality is essential. People should be breaking down the myths and stereotypes so that the legislature sees that gay people are like other people except that they prefer the same sex for emotional and sexual relationships. Legislation should not even be discussed in these individual meetings until the particular legislator has been convinced that his or her stereotypes are incorrect.

Another good way to educate legislators is through public hearings on positive legislation. Therefore I would urge Representative Berson to hold hearings on his bill to amend the Human Relations Commission Act, realizing that the legislation is not going to be passed for many years. The hearings will give us a vehicle to bring knowledgeable people from around the country to speak about homosexuality and to have gay people in Pennsylvania speak about their own lives. The hearings will also get good press coverage which will spur public debate and discussion.

We must remember that five years ago there were few gay people who were at all public. In Pennsylvania today there may be several hundred. Therefore, most people have not come in contact with openly gay people. Three years from now the number of openly gay people will be increased tenfold. However, in order to accelerate that process with the legislature we have to systematically see that each legislator is reached.

Another way to educate legislators is through the electoral process. Legislators must realize that they are also responsible to their gay constituents. All of the House of Representatives and one-half of the Senate are running for election. We must confront these legislators at every opportunity, in coffee clatches, church meetings, and other type of political rallies. As the election grows closer we should try to send each legislator's schedule to the gay groups in their areas so that they can attend these meetings.

First Year

Therefore, I suggest that the first year be a year of education. We should think of the best ways for this to be accomplished. We need a systematic, well-coordinated effort which will reach every legislator.

Second Year

The second year should probably be a time for a major push to repeal the sodomy statute. This could be done alone or in conjunction with the whole re-writing of the sexual offenses section. Several women's groups are advocating this type of revision. Debbie Glass at the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office can put you in touch with the women

who want this type of overall revision. We should then weigh whether to join forces with them or to battle for a repeal of the sodomy statute alone. I think our chances are better if we join forces. However, unless we have done our job of educating, the legislature will not be ready to repeal the sodomy statute in either case.

Third Year

Only after we repeal the sodomy statute should we expect to obtain enactment of the civil rights guarantees as amendment to the Human Relations Commission Act. This piece of legislation should be looked at as a long term possibility but should be constantly pushed because of its educational value.

The above thoughts are only my opinion. I think that the Committee should speak to friendly legislators to get their views and should seek out gay people in other states who have already gone through this process for other ideas.

BSK:km

cc: Mark Segal
Tony Silvestre
Sam Deetz

bc: Bill Hollabaugh,