

FINAL REPORT

OF THE

WISCONSIN GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON LESBIAN AND GAY ISSUES

January 2, 1987



State of Wisconsin

Governor's Council on Lesbian and Gay Issues

January 1, 1987

To Whom It May Concern:

Attached you will find the statutorily mandated final report of the Wisconsin Governor's Council on Lesbian and Gay Issues.

The final report summarizes the Council's history, structure, duties, conduct of business, statewide meetings, legislative activities and special achievements. As in all reports of groups doing business for almost four years, even this lengthy summary does not cover all of the activities of the Council's members and staff. However, we hope that this report will assure the gay and lesbian residents of Wisconsin that their virtually unique body of advocates always strove to judiciously employ the special power of being an executive advisory body to meet our community's needs. We hope as well that non-gay readers of this report will apprehend the importance of the Council to the fair governance of our state and will further understand the foresight and integrity expressed by Governor Anthony S. Earl in creating the Council.

Moreover, we hope that all residents who care about equitable government and desire the involvement of the resources of all of our state's citizens in the work of governance, will urge the new administration to create another group like the Council. There is so much left to do.

Sincerely,

Kathleen N. Nichols

Kathleen N. Nichols, Co-chair
Governor's Council on Lesbian and Gay Issues



State of Wisconsin

Governor's Council on Lesbian and Gay Issues

GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON LESBIAN AND GAY ISSUES January 2, 1987

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Section 1. HISTORY OF THE GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON LESBIAN AND GAY ISSUES

The Governor's Council on Lesbian and Gay Issues was created by Executive Order 9, on March 29, 1983. Governor Anthony S. Earl created the Council because he believed that it is a governor's duty to uphold the laws of the state. Wisconsin had become the only state in the nation with a state law prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation only one year earlier, and it was widely believed that many who could benefit by the law were unaware of its creation, as were many who may have been in violation. The Governor was also persuaded that gay men and lesbians were members of a minority group which had been discriminated against for most of the state's history and that to eliminate such a long history of discrimination would require informed advocates empowered by executive authority.

By Order the Council was to have fourteen members, serving two-year terms and the membership was to achieve gender parity, minority representation and cultural diversity. (See Attachment 1, Members of the Governor's Council on Lesbian and Gay Issues.) Furthermore, the Council was to work with government agencies, the public and the media to "eliminate discrimination against and victimization of lesbians and gays in Wisconsin" (See Attachment 2, Executive Order 9). During the first term of the Council the budget for both years totalled \$1000 and limited, as- needed clerical assistance was provided by Ms. Linda Lewis, an Administrative Assistant in the Executive Office. In the second term, due to the workload developed by an exceptionally active advisory council, the Council was granted use of the majority of the work hours of a new Constituent Relations Assistant, Earl Bricker. Along with all executive advisory committees, the Council's biennial budget was increased to \$2000.

The activities and achievements of the Governor's Council on Lesbian and Gay Issues are described in Sections 2 through 5 of this report.

Section 2. COMMUNITY MEETINGS

During the meetings held at Governor Earl's request by R. Richard Wagner and Kathleen Nichols, prior to the creation of the Council, gay and lesbian residents suggested that an advisory group to the Governor should dedicate a significant part of its time to meeting with gays and lesbians in all parts of the state to obtain direct information on our community's statewide needs and experience. It was also suggested that such meetings could serve to alert local officials about their responsibilities concerning gays and lesbians within their jurisdiction or service areas. This was deemed especially important for areas where there were no local gay and lesbian organizations and where there was strong belief in the negative repercussions of "coming out" for local lesbians and gays.

After the Council was created, the founding members agreed that meetings around the state would be an important activity of the Council.

Between June 1983 and October 1986 Community Meetings were held in:
(See Appendix 3 and map of Wisconsin.)

- | | | |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Appleton | 8. La Crosse | 15. Racine (2) |
| 2. Baraboo | 9. Madison | 16. Rhinelander |
| 3. Eau Claire | 10. Menasha | 17. Rice Lake |
| 4. Fond du Lac | 11. Menomonie | 18. Sheboygan |
| 5. Green Bay (2) | 12. Milwaukee (2) | 19. Stevens Point |
| 6. Janesville | 13. Monroe | 20. Superior |
| 7. Kenosha | 14. Platteville | 21. Tomah |
| | | 22. Wausau |

Over 1,200 hours of volunteer time were devoted to conducting all of the Community Meetings. The travel involved exhausted the funds available for reimbursement before the conclusion of each year, so most Council members received only partial reimbursement for expenses incurred.

At all of the Community Meetings where the Council was meeting for the first time the functions and history of the Council were explained and all members present were introduced. On most occasions, there was a presentation about the addition of sexual orientation to the state's equal opportunity law through Chapter 112 of the Laws of Wisconsin, 1982. Following these opening remarks the community members and local officials or agency representatives were introduced.

The nature of each meeting varied according to the composition of the group attending that particular meeting. Typically, attendance consisted of members of the lesbian and gay community of the city and surrounding area, often representing an organization, college officials, health care workers, counselors, women's groups, law enforcement officials and news reporters. Less often representatives from the mayor's office, county government, the schools and the District Attorney's office were in attendance. On only two occasions were legislative representatives in attendance.

Prior to all meetings every related governmental office or agency and all identifiable and appropriate local groups were invited to attend. All meetings were held in public places and publicly noticed. All were in compliance with the open meetings laws.

A very brief summary of the Community Meetings follows:

1983

Milwaukee, June 1983, Memorial Union, UW-Milwaukee: County Supervisor Penny Podell greeted the Council and urged more grassroots efforts to make local officials aware of the needs and contributions of the gay and lesbian community. Representatives from fourteen Milwaukee gay and lesbian and other civil rights groups made presentations to the Council concerning their activities. The presentations covered an impressive list ranging from religious ministry to business events.

Stevens Point, September 1983, Charles M. White Public Library: Mayor Michael Haberman welcomed the Council to Stevens Point saying that it was an elected official's responsibility to uphold the law without discrimination. UW-Stevens Point Vice Chancellor Patrick McDonough talked with members about harassment on campus. Representatives from Portage County's Departments of Health and Human Services discussed the need for increased sensitivity and knowledge in service delivery to gays and lesbians. The health care workers also expressed a need for AIDS information. John Osinga, Portage County D.A. told those attending that he thought the area's bad reputation for treatment of minorities was unwarranted. He discussed with the Council the responsibility of a District Attorney to prosecute discrimination in public accommodations. The high point of the meeting was the discussion with Ed Van Feldt, Principal of Stevens Point Area Senior High. Mr. Van Feldt expressed concern over harassment against more effeminate male students and the overall need to prepare students for adult life. Local gay activists offered to provide speakers and assistance to school counselors. Press coverage was ample and positive.

Eau Claire, October 1983, L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library: City Council Vice President Shirley Crinon greeted the Council noting that Eau Claire had no local ordinance against discrimination based on sexual orientation. Ruth Bachman, Eau Claire County Assistant District Attorney, discussed the failure of the D.A. to prosecute a locally originated case of discrimination in a public accommodation. A representative from UW-Eau Claire said the campus adhered to non-discrimination but said that there were no openly gay staff or student organizations. In contrast, a representative from

