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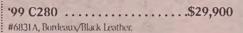
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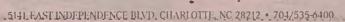
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Non-discrimination bills okayed by MD legislators, others could follow

by David Elliot Special to Q-Notes

ANNAPOLIS — Maryland is poised to become the twelfth state in the US to outlaw sexual orientation discrimination. Similar civil rights bills have cleared the House and Senate and await one more procedural vote before advancing to the desk of Gov. Parris Glendening, who has pledged his support.

Other civil rights bills passed the Illinois House and the Delaware House the last week in March and were headed to each state's Senate. Of these, only the Illinois bill includes gender identity as well as sexual orientation. New York's Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act passed a Senate committee and awaits a vote by the Senate.

Connecticut and Rhode Island have held hearings on measures to legalize same-sex marriage, with Rhode Island's hearing also covering a bill to recognize same-sex unions. Civil union bills remain alive in California as well as Rhode Island.

So far this year, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) has tracked 486 bills relating to the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community and to the HIV/AIDS community in all 50 state legislatures. Of these bills, 275 are favorable and 211 are unfavorable.

"The results of the 2001 state legislation sessions, in total, reflect continuing progress for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people," said NGLTF Executive Director Elizabeth Toledo. "It is historic that Maryland will become the 12th state to outlaw sexual-orientation discrimination. It is encouraging that three other states — Delaware, Illinois and New York — are considering taking similar steps. And it is invigorating that for the first time, multiple states are beginning to discuss and debate if and when to legalize civil unions and ultimately, same-sex marriage."

In other state legislative activity, so-called "Boy Scout Protection" and "Defense of Scouting" bills that would have prevented local public entities from saying no to discrimination appear stalled or dead. These anti-GLBT bills had been under consideration in Arizona, Georgia and Washington. In Arizona, a Boy Scouts bill died after a vote on the House floor. In Washington, a similar bill is stalled. And in Georgia, the Legislature has adjourned for the year.

Balancing these advances, however, Utah legislators have approved and the governor has signed an anti-GLBT bill relating to health education curriculum and prohibiting instruction in "advocacy of homosexuality." Similar bills are under consideration in Maine and Vermont.

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