

The Front Page

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'Crime Against Nature' Repeal Debated

Busloads of religious fundamentalists came to the state legislative building in Raleigh September 27 to urge the Criminal Code Revision Study Committee to keep the current sex laws on the books.

In response, seven speakers urged the committee to abandon laws that prohibit private sexual acts between consenting adults.

The committee is studying a new criminal code proposed in 1981 by the North Carolina Criminal Code Commission. The earlier commission, which was created in 1969 to review the state's criminal laws, recommended that state laws prohibiting adultery, cohabitation and "crime against nature" not be carried forward into the new code.

Committee meetings normally are sedate occasions, attended only by the 12 committee members, their staff and a small group of lobbyists. On September 27 the committee hearing room was packed with almost 200 people, many wearing big red badges proclaiming "Keep Crime Against Nature" or "No Revision in Sex Laws". Many had brought babies and children for the day-long meeting.

The Rev. Grant Price began the parade of fundamentalist speakers by proclaiming, "We strongly condemn homosexuality." Referring to the Biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah, Price said, "The same afflictions continue to plague us today. Homosexuality has destroyed every nation that has gone over to it. We have only one alternative — Repent!"

Mary Johnson of Buies Creek said that she had searched the proposed criminal code to find the laws that are currently on the books.

"Crime against nature, fornication and adultery, and persons of the opposite sex occupying a motel room — they are all repealed," Johnson said. "I feel betrayed."

Johnson quoted articles from Boston's *Gay Community News* and the *New York Native* that she said showed that "homosexuals want to engage in sex in public" and have sex with young children.

"How can law enforcement officials protect families and children if the crime against nature law is abolished?" she asked. When Johnson finished, she asked those who agreed with her to stand. Most of the crowd, which had apparently been invited by Johnson, stood — and then left with her.

Eric Prevatte, who said he represented the Lumberton Chamber of Commerce and nine churches, said that his concerns were child sex

abuse, child prostitution and pedophilia. Prevatte quoted a Charlotte *Observer* story about a pedophile who, according to Prevatte, said that "pedophilia is just another sexual orientation."

"When we remove the crime against nature law," Prevatte said, "we legalize homosexuality and bestiality anywhere that they want to do it."

Hank Vandergriff said that "repealing crime against nature could be construed to legitimate that particular lifestyle."

Vandergriff said that because he was young and slender, he was often approached by homosexuals. "I have been the subject of harassment by homosexuals," he said, "even to the point of being lured to people's apartments — padlocked in people's apartments."

The Rev. Coy C. Privette, executive director of the Christian Action League, a statewide conservative religious lobbying group, said that changing the "crime against nature" law could "open the doors of our state to deviant behavior."

Mike McIntyre, an attorney and chairman of the Young Democrats in the 7th Congressional District, also urged the committee to keep the "crime against nature" law.

He said that although "homosexuals represent only 10% of the population," they burdened society heavily. He quoted "statistics" that purported to show that gays are responsible for almost all of the sexually transmitted diseases in the United States.

"Homosexuals are 20 times more apt to molest children than heterosexuals," McIntyre also said.

Rev. Larry Griswold of Roanoke Rapids said the "crime against nature" law should be retained to prevent the spread of homosexual behavior. "We're a farming community," he said. "When we sow corn, corn comes up. In Atlantic City they sowed gambling. And do you know what's happened in Atlantic City?"

Crime prevails. When the law of God is perverted, crime will prevail."

After eight speakers opposing changes in the "crime against nature" and other sex laws, the first speaker came to the stand to support the proposed changes. John Boddie, a Raleigh attorney, said that the legitimate concerns of the previous speakers were all dealt with in the proposed code. Various sections of the code, he said, punished sexual assaults, sex with minors, public sex, bestiality and kidnapping.

"The issue before this committee is whether to carry forward into a new code the current laws dealing with cohabitation, adultery and crime against nature," Boddie said. "If these laws were to be fully enforced, we would be incarcerating a majority of the population of North Carolina."

The fundamentalist crowd erupted in boos and hisses, and the committee's co-chair, Senator James Edwards of Granite Falls, reprimanded the crowd for its outburst.

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Charlotte CRC Studies

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Community Relations Committee has voted to study homosexuality as a first step toward taking action on a list of seven recommendations proposed by a Charlotte gay man who says he has suffered harassment, according to stories in the *Charlotte Observer* and *Q-Notes*.

Several months ago, Gilbert Dale Cornelius submitted his recommendations to the committee. Cornelius, a former college English teacher, has often written pro-gay letters to Charlotte newspapers, some of which have been quoted in *The Front Page*.

At that time, Cornelius addressed the committee, testifying about the harassment he has been subject to since childhood. He explained how the verbal abuse made him feel "rejected by the world" and "isolated." Dr. Sherman Burson, chair of the committee's Human Resources Subcommittee, described Cornelius's address as "articulate."

Cornelius closed his address with seven recommendations to the committee:

- To actively seek two representatives from the gay community to sit on the committee.
- To encourage input from gay/lesbian individuals.
- To speak out as individuals and as a committee to address antigay incidents.

• To urge all appointed citizen committees to include gay men and lesbians.

• To support broadening existing antidiscrimination ordinances to include gay men and lesbians.

• To develop educational programs about the damage caused by antigay abuse.

• To design a program that would help parents learn not to condemn gay children, but rather to rear them with love and acceptance.

On August 9, Cornelius sent a letter to the committee describing an August 6 incident in which he was hit, kicked, and called "faggot" by a man after Cornelius refused to give him a cigarette while waiting for a bus. Cornelius said that the city bus driver did nothing when the verbal abuse continued after he boarded the bus. Instead, the driver said to the men abusing Cornelius, "You guys are so funny; I'm enjoying it."

In the same letter, Cornelius talked about growing up "in the 1950s — a hard time" and being "a bright young man [who] was called queer." He recalled how, returning home for a college vacation, he learned that a high school friend had been imprisoned for homosexuality. "Now," Cornelius said, "I was not only anxious, but frightened as well."

Because of the letter, the Community Relations Committee, at its August 29 meeting, passed a motion to adopt the recommendations of its Human Resources Subcommittee. As a result, it will hold a fact-finding meeting on September 19 to define "the condition of homosexuality." Clinical and academic psychologists will be invited to address the full committee.

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