



# Buffalo / Niagara

PO Box 617  
Buffalo, NY 14207

716-883-0384

pflag@bfn.org  
www.pflag-buffalo-niagara.org

*We meet because we have learned that someone very close to us is Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, or Transgendered.*

*We try to help one another deal with this information in a positive manner.*

*Although we do not agree at all times, we try to be understanding.*

*We offer help to those who seek it, but do not force ourselves on others.*

*We strive to maintain anonymity while sharing on a level that is comfortable for all of us.*

*We encourage all to attend meetings for their own benefit as well as that of the group.*

*It is our hope that when each of us reaches a point of understanding and acceptance, we realize that this is when others need us the most.*

## Buffalo Monthly Meeting

**Sunday, September 21, 2008**

2:30 – 5:00 PM

The August meeting will be a self-help sharing meeting. As always, newcomers will be offered the alternative of meeting privately with a PFLAG parent.

Heritage Room, Westminster Presbyterian Church  
724 Delaware Avenue, Buffalo, New York 14209

Use the driveway to left of the church to reach the church parking lot. Walk behind the church to other side of the building (through the nursery school) and enter through the kitchen entrance.

## New Parents Meetings

**These meetings are scheduled as needed. Please call the helpline.**

Christ United Methodist Church Library  
350 Saratoga (corner of Harlem Road), Snyder, NY  
North of the Harlem Road exit of Route 33

Enter through door closest to the lighted parking lot. This self-help one-on-one meeting deals with the concerns of parents and family members who have recently learned that a loved one is Lesbian or Gay.

**For Niagara satellite meeting details, call 297-5785.**

**Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, Buffalo/Niagara, is a non-profit, all volunteer, community-based organization not affiliated with any ethnic, religious, economic, or political group. Membership is open to all. PFLAG membership lists are kept confidential; and mailings are sent in plain envelopes.**



## Local News

### Queer Journeys Programs

Queer Journeys is a cable access program sponsored by PFLAG Buffalo/Niagara and coordinated by Camille Cox and Babs Conant. The programs are based on documentaries on GLBT issues. This program only airs in Buffalo, on Mondays at 6:30 pm and Tuesdays at 1:00 am on Adelphia Channel 20.

The schedule for the next two months is:

- Sep 1: Safe School Program for Youth in Massachusetts
- Sep 8: A Little Respect
- Sep 15: Choosing Children, Pt 1
- Sep 22: Choosing Children, Pt 2
- Sep 29: Our Brother, Dan
- Oct 6: An Unexpected Journey
- Oct 13: All God's Children
- Oct 20: Claiming America's Promise
- Oct 27: The Families We Choose

A short description of the storylines and a full schedule can be found on our website at: [www.pflag-buffalo-niagara.org/video\\_project.shtml](http://www.pflag-buffalo-niagara.org/video_project.shtml)

### What's Happening in PFLAG Buffalo/Niagara

John Covert

Here we are in September. Summer is nearly over, the kids are ready to go back to school and most of us wonder where the summer has gone. The PFLAG board has been very busy over the summer and we have some very exciting news to share with you. Our 1<sup>st</sup> annual fundraiser using the New York State lottery numbers is underway. Profits from this fundraiser will be used for the newly created 'Parent Education Fund' whose sole purpose is to educate parents on GLBT issues. We have also worked to make the monthly meetings more informative and educational. We will have several guest speakers during the upcoming months including an educational discussion on Transgendered issues in September, and in October, Marc Adams, Executive Director of HeartStrong Inc will be in Buffalo to speak to us. HeartStrong is the only educational nonprofit organization with the sole mission of providing outreach to GLBT youths terrorized at religious educational institutions. We are also planning several videos to be shown on various topics, and a gay trivia fun-day (with prizes!!!). Although it will be fun, it will also be educational for everyone. Please plan to join us.

PFLAG Buffalo/Niagara is also planning a new program for us – Safe Schools. Although this program has been in existence nationally for quite a few years, the

Buffalo/Niagara chapter will begin reach out to school nurses and PTAs about GLBT issues. It is hard to believe in this day, but there are still problems with bullying in schools that can and do result in severe physical and emotional problems for our kids. The Safe Schools objective is to make all kids safe while they are at schools.

One last item to mention is that this is an election year and PFLAG is a non-profit organization, commonly known as a 501(c)(3). This means that we cannot endorse any candidate for any office, no matter whether the election is federal, state or local. We cannot speak on behalf of any candidate, as a representative of PFLAG. As private individuals we can run for office ourselves, work for any campaign, raise funds, etc. We just cannot do it as a representative of PFLAG. You will periodically see articles appearing in this newsletter on positions taken by candidates on GLBT related issues. These articles will appear in an unbiased manner – just presenting the facts and will mostly be press releases from PFLAG national office. PFLAG is always looking for people who are willing and able to get involved. If you want to become involved, call the helpline.

### Board Member Profile

PFLAG Buffalo/Niagara will run a series of profiles of the members of the chapter's Board of Directors so that the membership knows who we are and what we do.

#### Jeffrey J. McConnell, Treasurer



Jeff McConnell is the longest standing member of the board having served since 1990. He has also been treasurer of PFLAG Buffalo/Niagara since 1996. In addition to keeping track of our money and balancing the books, Jeff also maintains our membership list and checks the Post Office box

for mail because most of what arrives are membership checks, checks from United Way and the Community Fund, and bills.

Jeff design skills also come into play for the chapter. Jeff designed and maintains the chapter web site and he designed the current newsletter layout and our chapter letterhead. He is also responsible for laying out the newsletter content into the form you have in your hands. He's also responsible for checking and forwarding email messages that arrive for the chapter.

When he's not working for PFLAG Buffalo/Niagara, Jeff is a professor of computer science at Canisius College and Canisius is also where he received his degree. He is the author of four computer science books and is internationally known in computer science education for his work in active and cooperative learning. He has also served on several advisory councils for Erie County Community College. In 1993, he was honored by

Canisius for his contributions to Women's Studies and in 2002 by Erie County Community College for his contributions on advisory councils.

Jeff has lived in Buffalo for most of his life and has lived in North Buffalo for 23 years. He and his partner Fred have been together for over 16 years. He has been active in politics on and off since 1980 and most recently was one of the Western New York coordinators for the 2004 Howard Dean presidential campaign and has been a member of the Erie County Democratic Committee since 2004.

## Blue Cross Agrees To Cover Gay Couples

365gay Newscenter Staff

Blue Cross & Blue Shield settled a lawsuit by a married lesbian couple that the insurer previously refused to cover.

Jeanne Kornowicz and Joy Higgins were married in Ontario in 2006. Kornowicz, a school psychologist for the Cheektowaga Central School district, applied to the school board to provide health coverage for her spouse Higgins, after a Rochester court ruled in a similar case that New York State must recognize valid out-of-state marriages of lesbian and gay couples. The state's highest court upheld the ruling.

The school district approved, but its insurer, Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Western New York, denied the coverage.

The couple was represented by the New York Civil Liberties Union. In its court filing, the NYCLU noted both the Rochester ruling and a directive issued last month by Gov. David Paterson instructing state agencies - including those governing insurance and health care - to immediately change policies and regulations to recognize gay marriages performed in areas where they are legal.

The NYCLU also said that unlike Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Western New York, many other New York insurers, including other insurers carrying the Blue Cross & Blue Shield name, have been recognizing same-sex couples' valid out-of-state marriages for years.

The NYCLU said that the insurer has agreed to follow the Rochester ruling.

Kornowicz and Higgins have had a committed relationship since 1998. Higgins gave birth to the couple's daughter, Elizabeth Higgins, in July 2007, and Kornowicz's second-parent adoption of Elizabeth was made final in January of this year.

Neither the Rochester ruling nor Paterson's directive allowed for same-sex couples to marry in New York. Both were limited to marriages performed only in California, Massachusetts and in countries such as Canada, which have legalized gay marriage.

In 2006, the New York Court of Appeals, the state's highest court, ruled that same-sex couples do not have an automatic constitutional right to marry in the state. It said that the issue, however, could be taken up by the legislature.

Last year the Democratically-controlled New York State Assembly passed same-sex marriage legislation, but the GOP-controlled Senate has refused to take up the bill.

## Education

### Suit against gay marriage recognition in NY tossed

Jennifer Peltz, Associated Press

A judge has thrown out the first direct legal challenge to the New York governor's move to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states, calling the policy a legally allowable stand for fairness.

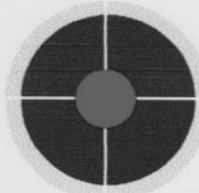
A decision by gay couples to wed represents "a personal expression of emotional devotion, support and interdependence and a public commitment," state Supreme Court Judge Lucy Billings wrote in a decision issued September 2<sup>nd</sup>. "With that validity, they expect equal treatment with other married couples."

Thousands of gay New Yorkers over the next few years are expected to make use of Massachusetts' recent decision to let out-of-state gay couples marry there. The Christian legal organization that brought the New York case said it would appeal, while gay-rights and civil-

**Kay Patterson, LMHC**  
Licensed Mental Health Counselor

*Counseling for Change*

5820 Main Street, Suite 203, Williamsville, NY 14221  
Phone: (716) 838-1236 Cell: (716) 583-4902  
Email: Pattersoncounsel@aol.com



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liberties groups hailed the ruling as strengthening legal support for same-sex couples.

In a statement, Gov. David Paterson called it "a wise and fair determination."

Same-sex couples cannot marry in New York, and the state's highest court has said only the Legislature has the authority to change that. But Paterson's counsel told state agencies in May that a recent state appellate court ruling required them to recognize gay marriages legally performed elsewhere or risk discrimination claims.

The directive prompted a lawsuit from the Alliance Defense Fund, an Arizona-based group that has repeatedly challenged attempts to extend spousal rights to gay couples in New York. Several Republican state senators had signed onto the latest suit.

The Alliance is involved in cases around the country that concern gay marriage, abortion, school prayer and other social issues. It already had several ongoing cases over attempts to extend spousal rights to gay couples in New York.

Attorneys for the Alliance have said it opposes gay marriage in general, but the group's case against Paterson focused on what it saw as overstepping his constitutional authority.

The Alliance argued that recognizing out-of-state gay marriages was up to the Legislature, not the governor, and that legislators hadn't moved toward such recognition.

The Democratic governor's lawyers noted that lawmakers hadn't expressly barred it, either, despite several proposals.

The judge agreed, calling the policy a "permissible, if not mandated, step toward the objective of equality for a group for whom legal as well as practical barriers to equality persist." She also said refusing to respect a same-sex marriage conducted elsewhere is "antithetical to family stability."

Alliance Defense Fund lawyer Jim Campbell said the judge's decision made New York subject to other states' choices on same-sex marriage. He challenged her holding that New York's Legislature had "conspicuously" declined to act on honoring out-of-state gay weddings.

"If you define marriage for yourself and something from somewhere else conflicts with your definition of

marriage, it's redundant and unnecessary to declare that you're not going to recognize that out-of-state (policy)," he said.

Lambda Legal, a gay rights group that entered the case on behalf of two female state employees who married in Canada, said the judge's decision amplified "a steady drumbeat of courts recognizing long-standing New York law as it applies to same-sex couples."

The governor's office said Tuesday that it is unaware of any other pending legal challenges. The policy has already been implemented.

Massachusetts and California are the only states that allow gay marriages. Out-of-state gay couples were unable to marry in Massachusetts until the July 31 repeal of a nearly century-old ban on any marriage that would be illegal in a couple's home state.

Some other states let same-sex couples enter into civil unions offering some of marriage's legal advantages.

In New York, marriage is accompanied by more than 1,300 rights and duties, according to a tally by the gay-rights group Empire State Pride Agenda. The rights are as broad as protections against having to testify against a spouse and as specific as public housing priority for veterans' widows.

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## Presidential Candidate John McCain Announces Opposition to Adoption Rights for Lesbian and Gay Couples

PFLAG National Staff

In an interview published in the *New York Times*, Senator John McCain (R-AZ), the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, announced his unequivocal opposition to adoption rights for lesbian and gay couples. "I think that we've proven that both parents are important in the success of a family so, no, I don't believe in gay adoption," McCain, who with his wife Cindy is a foster parent, told the paper.

"In a country where more than 125,000 children are waiting for foster parents, Senator McCain would deny loving homes to children who desperately need them simply because of an outdated prejudice about what a family may look like," said Jody M. Huckaby, executive director of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and

ssdickinson@roadrunner.com

**SHEILA SULLIVAN DICKINSON**  
ATTORNEY & COUNSELOR AT LAW

733 WEST DELAVAN AVE., #2  
BUFFALO, NEW YORK 14222

TELEPHONE: 716.816.0933  
FAX: 716.816.0280

## Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus

695 Elmwood Avenue, Buffalo, NY  
Tickets & info: 883-1277

[www.buffalogaymenschorus.org](http://www.buffalogaymenschorus.org)

Gays (PFLAG). “We are disappointed and saddened that a public leader who is himself an adoptive father would deny the children in America’s foster care system the opportunity to thrive as part of a welcoming family. Love makes a family, but short-sighted positions like Senator McCain’s can certainly tear families apart, too.”

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, “A growing body of scientific literature demonstrates that children who grow up with 1 or 2 gay and/or lesbian parents fare as well in emotional, cognitive, social, and sexual functioning as do children whose parents are heterosexual.” The AAP has also noted that, “Overall, there are more similarities than differences in the parenting styles and attitudes of gay and non-gay” parents. Children raised by same-sex couples “seem to develop normally in every way,” the group has reported.

“In fact,,” the Academy has said, “growing up with parents who are lesbian or gay may confer some advantages to children. They have been described as more tolerant of diversity and more nurturing toward younger children than children whose parents are heterosexual.”

“Senator McCain’s position is out of synch with the research and science and out of step with what is in the best interests of children waiting for a home and a family,” Huckaby said. “PFLAG knows the pain inflicted upon families due to misinformation about LGBT issues. We implore Senator McCain to take a serious look at the overwhelming evidence and listen to the stories of the countless children raised by loving lesbian and gay couples. The evidence is clear: children should not be denied access to the loving homes of gay couples.”



## Advocacy

### Safe and Inclusive Schools

Making schools in our nation safe for all youth, but particularly for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) young people, has long been among PFLAG’s top priorities. GLBT youth, or those perceived to be, face unspeakable harassment and abuse in schools and are too often effectively denied access to a safe and equal education opportunity. The school culture that fosters and sustains this hostile environment impacts all students negatively. The average high school student hears 25 anti-gay slurs daily. Ninety-seven percent of high school students regularly hear homophobic remarks. This harassment takes its toll: Gay students are far more likely to skip classes, drop out of school and/or commit suicide. “Safe schools” also means inclusive schools. PFLAG has been a leader in the fight for educational programs and curricula that are inclusive of the concerns of GLBT students. Accurate, unbiased, and fair

information about GLBT issues – from health to history – is key to creating a welcoming and supportive educational environment for all students.

## Comprehensive Sexual Education

**Bill Name: Responsible Education About Life (REAL) Act**

**Bill Number: H.R. 1653, S. 972**

### What this bill will do:

Currently, states can only receive federal funding for sexuality education if they agree to teach abstinence-only-until-marriage, which routinely excludes critical information about the health benefits of contraception to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Because of the marriage stipulation, the inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals (GLBT) in the curriculum is virtually nonexistent. The REAL Act would authorize the first federal programs for comprehensive, honest sex education. It would provide funding for states to implement comprehensive approaches that include information about both abstinence and contraception and condoms, from both the values and public health perspectives.

### What you need to ask for:

Ask your legislator to support this bill. If he or she is not currently a cosponsor of the REAL Act, ask that they become one. Contact members of the Health subcommittee (House) or Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (Senate) to urge passage to full House/Senate for a vote.

### PFLAG Talking Points:

- Since GLBT individuals are barred from marriage in every state except Massachusetts, abstinence-only-until-marriage programs completely ignore and dismiss the existence of GLBT youth, the realities of their lives, and their critical health information needs.
- Abstinence-only-until-marriage programs have been shown to be ineffective and dangerously inaccurate.
- Educators must be allowed and encouraged to present programs that are based on effective, science-driven information, respect the diversity of values and beliefs represented in the community and complement the education children receive from their families.
- While there are three separate federal funding streams dedicated to abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, no federal funding currently exists specifically for comprehensive sexuality education.

### Notes:

Both bills were introduced on March 22, 2007, and were referred to committees. The Senate version was introduced by Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) and has 6 cosponsors. The House version was introduced by Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA) and has 17 co-sponsors.

**PFLAG BUFFALO/NIAGARA  
2008 – 2009**

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**Newsletter Staff**  
**Editor:** John Covert  
**Design:** Jeffrey J. McConnell  
**Contributors:** John Covert  
 Jeffrey J. McConnell  
 Jennifer Peltz  
 PFLAG National Staff  
 365gay Newscenter Staff

**Duplication:** Jeffrey J. McConnell  
**Distribution:** Paula Jack and Michele A. Perry

**CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

- Tue 9/16 PFLAG St. Catharines, Ontario monthly meeting. [www.pflag.ca/StCatharines.htm](http://www.pflag.ca/StCatharines.htm)
- Sun 9/21 PFLAG Buffalo/Niagara monthly meeting.
- Sun 10/19 PFLAG Buffalo/Niagara monthly meeting.
- Tue 10/21 PFLAG St. Catharines, Ontario monthly meeting. [www.pflag.ca/StCatharines.htm](http://www.pflag.ca/StCatharines.htm)
- Sun 11/16 PFLAG Buffalo/Niagara Annual Picnic.
- Tue 11/18 PFLAG St. Catharines, Ontario monthly meeting. [www.pflag.ca/StCatharines.htm](http://www.pflag.ca/StCatharines.htm)
- Tue 12/16 PFLAG St. Catharines, Ontario monthly meeting. [www.pflag.ca/StCatharines.htm](http://www.pflag.ca/StCatharines.htm)
- Sun 12/21 PFLAG Buffalo/Niagara monthly meeting.

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