

Pennsylvania Civil Rights Initiative History: 1996-2003
Senate Highlights (For a discussion of the House, please call)
(Rev. January 2003. Italics represent additional comments)

- August 1996** PLGTF launches the Pennsylvania Civil Rights Initiative for civil rights and education rights statewide, reaching 67 counties and impacting more than one million gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people. Briefings with Harrisburg, Lancaster, Pittsburgh, and York activists encourage movement (n-150). (Proposed bills and study at www.plgtf.org)
- 1997** PLGTF convenes a media center briefing with 25 legislators re: the 1996 Pennsylvania Study of Discrimination and Violence (Larry Gross, Ph.D. with Steven Aurand) and legal remedies. After a six-month long negotiation, Republican Governor Tom Ridge's Cabinet agrees to meet with a PLGTF-convened team, but **refuses** to support civil and education rights.
- 1998** Joining the Pennsylvania Federation of Teachers (**PAFT**) and the Philadelphia Bar Association, the Pennsylvania State Education Association (**PSEA**) membership votes to support the PLGTF Initiative. With community partners across the state, PLGTF launches the **Rainbow Postcard Campaign**. Thirty-six hundred Pennsylvanians sign on. Briefings with Democratic and Republican leaders reveal leaders' contempt, apathy, or inaction. Over time, **five or six** Senators agree, publicly, to co-sponsor the Initiative bills.
- May 1998-9** A PLGTF-convened team of grassroots activists from across the state meets with Senators **Allan Kukovich** (D-Westmoreland) and **Allyson Schwartz** (D-Philadelphia) to introduce the proposed legislation. Later, Kukovich spearheads a **law and order** amendment to the Bias Crime Statute but, like Schwartz, will **not** spearhead the Initiative to extend civil rights and education rights to our communities, citing a "lack of colleague support." The Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus, under the leadership of Representative James Roebuck (D-Philadelphia), sponsors an invitational briefing. Rep. LeAnna Washington avoids subsequent requests. While Caucus members seem to support the Initiative, **none** will serve as prime sponsor.
- July 2000** PLGTF's just-published fourth statewide **study** shows that *one of every two* gay and lesbian people has suffered discrimination over their lifetime and experienced high abuse levels in *educational* settings. Pennsylvania respondents are *three times more likely* to experience criminal violence than U.S.A. adults are overall. Anecdotal evidence reveals similar patterns of harassment and violence towards transgendered people (see also www.transgenderlaw.org) *Senate (and House) Republican and Democratic "leadership" refuse to invite a group briefing. (Note: in July 2001, House democrat leader Mark Cohen agrees and does not introduce the Initiative legislation. He asserts his dislike of the "Core Principles")* A comparison of decade-long studies shows that little has changed, thanks to **official** malign neglect. (www.plgtf.org)
- June 2002** **Senator Vincent Hughes** (D-Philadelphia) **agrees to introduce the Initiative bills**. Within several days, Senator *Kukovich* (above) asks Senator *Hughes* to delay introduction while the House side considers a decade-long proposed law and order amendment. The hate crime amendment stiffens penalties for criminals, and is **unrelated** to the expansion of basic civil rights and education rights to minority groups, in whole or in part. It is used as a bogus rationale to delay public debate and expansion of our rights. Eight (8) Senators agree to cosponsor the bills; none will introduce.
- Sum** Over the period, one or more personal briefings with **45** individual legislators are completed. With an estimated **100 organization allies**, a consistent and rigorous grassroots campaign results in **6,000** plus Initiative petitions signatories). High-level briefings and community pressure mount to create critical mass to move the Initiative. Legislators deflect attention to misnamed hate crime penalties ignoring their own. *Harrisburg* and *Pittsburgh* Human Relations Commissions join the *Philadelphia* Commission in support of the Initiative, different from the state commission, which does not. Senate leadership (and House leadership) fail to respond to repeated requests (written and verbal) to introduce, debate, and adopt the Initiative bills to extend civil rights and education rights to our communities. Core principles remain the critical foundation for accelerated community building and organizing efforts in 2003.