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|| NEWS ||

October 27, 2005

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Maine gays speak out against repeal of gay rights law

Three gay men told their stories of discrimination and harassment Wednesday while speaking out in favor of a statewide gay rights law. Martin Ripley of Whitefield told reporters that he was harassed and let go from a job in Portland simply because people suspected he was gay.

George O'Brien of Newcastle said that when he came out publicly as gay, he was threatened on the job and told that he might be found "floating in the river." After he quit, he was harassed and let go from his next two jobs because of his sexual orientation, he said. "I think most Mainers would agree the way I was treated was unfair and wrong," he said.

Adam Flanders of Belfast, who graduated from high school last spring, said he was hassled in high school and suspended for wearing a T-shirt that said, "It's OK to be gay." "People felt free to be hostile toward me just because I was gay," he said.

The press conference was organized by the gay rights group Maine Won't Discriminate. Jesse Connolly, spokesman for the organization, said the experiences of Ripley, O'Brien, and Flanders show the need for keeping the gay rights law in place. "Their stories are real and speak to a grave injustice that exists in our state," he said.

A call seeking comment from the Christian Civic League of Maine, which supports the repeal, was not immediately returned. Supporters of the effort to repeal the state's gay rights law, which was passed by legislators last spring, say there is no need for the law and that it will serve as a first step toward legalizing same-sex marriage. Voters will decide November 8 whether state law should ban discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment, credit, housing, public accommodations, and education. Maine voters rejected similar gay rights laws in 1998 and 2000. (AP)

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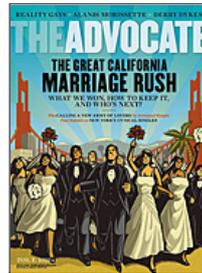
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