



Citizens for a Responsible Government

Maryland Citizens for a Responsible Government

www.notmyshower.net

PETITION DRIVE TOPS 31,000 SIGNATURES TO GET TRANSGENDER BILL BEFORE VOTERS

INTIMIDATION BY TRANSGENDER ACTIVISTS COST SIGNATURES

For release: 4:00 pm
February 19, 2008

Contact: Michelle Turner
(301) 335-6042

Montgomery County, MD – A grassroots citizens group opposing the county's new gender identity bill handed boxes of signed petitions over to the Board of Elections today, before its 5:00 deadline. A total of 25,001 valid signatures would allow the measure to be put up for a popular vote next November. In order for a bill to be placed on a ballot, a petition drive must collect the signatures of 5% of the county's registered voters.

Maryland Citizens for a Responsible Government submitted its first round of 15,462 signatures on February 4, as required by the Board. Those submitted today represent the balance. The Board must next validate that each signer is a registered Montgomery County voter.

‘No exemption, no bill’ became the mantra of the group which believes that without words specifically excluding restrooms, locker rooms, and shower rooms, the bill will put women’s safety and privacy at risk.

“The citizens of Montgomery County are clearly making their voices heard. We have found that this issue straddles every demographic and political line. The ease with which the signatures have been obtained and the indignation of the voters demonstrate how isolated the council is from its constituents,” said Dr. Ruth Jacobs, president of Maryland Citizens for a Responsible Government, the group running the drive.

The Montgomery County Council’s loosely written bill has no exemption for bathrooms, locker rooms or showers. “Even the gender component of the Federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act sponsored by Representative Barney Frank had an exemption for places of ‘shared nudity’. Rep. Frank had to drop the gender provision for lack of support,” she said.

“Instead of representing Montgomery County citizens, Councilwoman Duchy Trachtenberg (D-At Large), sponsor of the bill, may well be titled the councilwoman for outside special interests. Trachtenberg has accumulated almost \$400,000 in campaign funds, over 60% from out of state. Marc Elrich, another first term council member, raised \$148,000, with 99% coming from county citizens. We do wonder whose interests she is serving,” said Michelle Turner, MCRG spokeswoman.

[http://mdelections.umbc.edu/campaign_finance/ctprocess1.php?acctno=A2205]

CLAIMS OF HARASSMENT

Dana Beyer, a senior policy advisor to Councilwoman Duchy Trachtenberg, and other transgenders showed up at several petition sites over

the weekend to disrupt the collection of signatures, telling volunteers to “shut up” and getting petition collectors removed from shopping malls by complaining to the management, according to several MCRG volunteers. In two instances, police had to be called by store management in order to stop the harassment of Montgomery County residents who wished to sign the petition.

On Tuesday, during the primary election, Maryanne Arnow, a transgender, had to be ordered by an Election Judge to stop harassing a MCRG volunteer at the polling place located at Stone Mill Elementary School in Gaithersburg. Arnow was told to stop or leave.

James Kennedy, a non-transgender member of the group, ignored the pleas of a Muslim volunteer collecting signatures at Congressional Plaza when they snapped her photograph, which she said violates her religion. Her photograph is now posted on his activist website, apparently to intimidate her and other volunteers.

John Garza, attorney for the volunteers, said they are considering filing a civil rights lawsuit because of the extent of the harassment. "I am deeply troubled by these intimidation tactics. Such tactics are commonly used by totalitarian governments. There is no place for this in Montgomery County. This undemocratic conduct is especially reprehensible when it is coming from a senior-level employee of the Council. Dana Beyer and the others are passionate about the issue, but it behooves them to let the democratic process proceed," he said, "We hope that these tactics didn't impede the collection of signatures to the point that our petition drive fails to be certified."

The bill was passed unanimously by the Council and signed into law by County Executive Isiah Leggett last November.

It gives ‘gender identity’ protected status under the county’s non-discrimination code, and covers housing, employment, public accommodations and their “facilities.”

According to opponents of the bill, public accommodations include the restrooms in malls, theaters, community swimming pools, and even health clubs, which are not immune simply because they require membership. They claim that without a specific exemption, it will only take a lawsuit to have transvestite ‘rights’ enforced. Trachtenberg and Leggett have repeatedly claimed that these areas will be allowed to remain separated by sex.

However, Susan Jamison, a MCRG volunteer and attorney, wrote to Leggett (http://www.notmyshower.net/crg_response_to_leggett.pdf) claiming that such statements are not binding. “It seems to me that few judges would agree in light of the many serious race and religious discriminatory practices such a holding could engender. Your argument that this term [“distinctly personal and private”] refers to restrooms, and that restrooms are not public facilities at public accommodations, seriously threatens to engender discriminatory practices against other protected classes,” she said.

The new county law states, “Gender identity means an individual’s actual or perceived gender including a person’s gender-related appearance, expression, image, identity or behavior, whether or not those gender-related characteristics differ from the characteristics customarily associated with the person’s assigned sex at birth.”

Over the past 10 weeks, several hundred volunteers fanned out across the county educating the public about the bill and asking for signatures, going door to door and canvassing at shopping centers, malls, grocery stores,

and churches. The group ran radio ads and recorded a robo call message that reached every household in the county. The robo calls informed citizens where they could go to sign petitions. However, several locations were closed down because of the harassment of these volunteers by Beyer and others, resulting in a loss of signatures.

#####