

For Weddings, Yet a Funeral

By Jenna

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Abstract

On January 28th, 2011, if you were told that the Trans community would be more organized than the LGB community moving forward in the next legislative session, that Marriage and the Gender Identity anti-discrimination bills would both come razor close to passage yet fail and the Equality Maryland (EQMD) would for all intents and purposes, [...]

Article

On January 28th, 2011, if you were told that the Trans community would be more organized than the LGB community moving forward in the next legislative session, that Marriage and the Gender Identity anti-discrimination bills would both come razor close to passage yet fail and the Equality Maryland (EQMD) would for all intents and purposes, cease to exist, you'd laugh until you dropped.

I don't hear any laughter today.

On January 28th, 2011, Delegate Joseline Pena-Melnyk introduce in the Maryland House of Delegates House Bill 235, titled Human Relations - Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity - Antidiscrimination. Even the title was ominous. It spoke of a unity and support, which at least from the strategy and board's positions, did not exist. Much has been written and rehashed over the last session but the stark fact remains. Equality Maryland will close its doors come June 28th unless a large infusion of cash materializes.

In April, beleaguered Executive Director Morgan Menesse Sheets was fired and replaced with Interim Director Lynne Bowman. Ms Bowman's immediate task was to circle the wagons, and assess the damage. EQMD launched a series of Listening Tours. An examination of the organizations financial house and its database of contributors and supporters revealed as much serious damage to them as there was to their reputation. Finger pointing ensued between the Board and the ousted Ms Menesse Sheets. In the end, its non grant funded field organizers were laid off and later given the opportunity to be rehired, but only through the end of June at which time only the Office Manager would remain on staff. The little discussed fact that The Human Rights Campaign's (HRC) Field Organizer Sultan Shakir had set up shop inside of EQMD's headquarters as early as 4th quarter 2010 with the intent of "running the marriage campaign". His title was in fact, Campaign Manager. Mr Shakir is no stranger to the Maryland LGBT landscape, having served as former Vice President of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center of Baltimore and Central Maryland (GLCCB). HRC and other national organizations like Freedom to Marry (FtM) and The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) also provided resources for the marriage cause.

While they planned weddings, the transgender community planned even one more funeral. Tyra Trent was found without identification and strangled in the basement of an abandoned Baltimore house. An unacceptable statistic is that transgender women accounted for 11% of hate crimes reported and 50% of all murder cases in 2009 as compiled by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs.

From those EQMD staffers on the street and in the halls of Annapolis there was a desire for gender identity rights first, and marriage second. The board felt otherwise and enlisted the “advocacy coalition” from outside the state to push this. It was this advocacy coalition’s decision to push to recommit the marriage bill when the vote count looked lost. It was their decision to pack up shop on March 12th, the day after the marriage bill died. But wait; there was still the gender identity bill. No matter. They were not there for that battle. Have they ever been?

The aftermath is an EQMD with substantial financial difficulties and a future which is quite unclear. In a world where just being a 501(c)3 or (c)4 makes you relevant, they sure are non relevant.

In their zest for Marriage, there is yet one more funeral...

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