



Legal Landscape

Forty Years On

This summer's 40th anniversary of the moonwalk got me thinking about how far technology has advanced in the last four decades. Back in 1969, the internet, MRI's, hybrid cars, genetic engineering and iPhones were hardly even the stuff of dreams.

Likewise, the legal issues posed by some of Lambda Legal's current cases would have been hard to imagine at the time of the Stonewall riots that same year. Who would have thought back then that we would be dealing now with questions such as whether marriages legally entered by same-sex couples in other states or countries must be honored in New York; what the legal effect is in Louisiana of a second parent adoption secured in another state; what obligations schools have to protect LGBT students against peer harassment; whether an Arkansas assisted-living facility can deny someone admission because he is HIV-positive; and whether the Constitution prohibits Wisconsin from categorically denying hormone therapy to transgender inmates in state custody?

Just as today's technological wonders have been developed by combining the lessons learned from prior advances and failures with inspiration about what could lie ahead, Lambda Legal has both first-hand knowledge of our community's past successes and setbacks and a comprehensive vision for the future that readies us for handling the legal challenges of today and tomorrow.

We've been fighting for the rights of same-sex couples for decades and for marriage equality since we first entered the Hawaii marriage case in 1993. We secured the first second-parent adoption in New Jersey that same year. We have been counsel in cases that have set the country's leading precedents about students' rights to be out, safe, and respected at school. We brought the first AIDS discrimination case in the nation. And we have been involved in dozens of transgender-rights cases over the years. Both the wins

and losses have helped us understand what evidence and arguments have the best chances of moving judges and juries who are deciding the new cases that now fill our docket.

And like those who have imagined the technological progress they helped produce, Lambda Legal throughout has had a clear vision of the future that inspires our work. It's a vision of a nation where all people are treated equally, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or HIV status. While many of the issues presented by our current caseload may seem complex, at base they are all really just about that. When different-sex couples legally marry in Canada or Connecticut, there's no question that they are legally married when they cross the border to New York. We seek that same treatment for same-sex couples. Just like all other adopted children, those with lesbian and gay parents are entitled to have their adoptions respected in every state. All students deserve to be safe at school and to form student clubs free from discrimination. No one should be denied equal access to services or housing due to baseless fears. And even prison officials should not be able to deny prescribed medical treatment to inmates who need the care.

The world we inhabit today would have been hard to predict four decades ago. Like our modern inventions, terms like *domestic partnership*, *intended parent*, *gay-straight alliance*, and *gender identity* had not even been conceived of at the time of the moonwalk and Stonewall. Luckily, however, Lambda Legal's guiding vision and experience litigating on the cutting edge have us well-equipped to tackle the LGBT civil rights issues of the 21st century.

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