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Equality Illinois Annual Report Shows Growth and Expansion of Advocacy

CHICAGO -- Continued growth and expanded statewide advocacy highlight the 2012 Annual Report for Equality Illinois, the state's oldest, largest and most effective LGBT advocacy organization.

The additional resources enabled Equality Illinois to touch every corner of the state and intensify the campaign for fairness and respect for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Illinoisans and their families.

"We believe that the state's leading LGBT advocacy organization owes the community, our members, supporters and allies full transparency about our operations," said Bernard Cherkasov, CEO of Equality Illinois. "I invite everyone to look at the FY2012 Annual Report and see for yourselves how your money is spent to advance our important mission."

The full report can be read at http://issuu.com/eqil/docs/2012_ei_annual_report .

During the course of the year, the Annual Report notes, Equality Illinois accomplished a lot, including:

- Launched the "I Do" marriage equality campaign, obtained thousands of "I Do" support marriage equality postcards to be sent to lawmakers in every district in the state, and published religion and business case studies in support of marriage equality.
- Sponsored and participated in scores of events throughout Illinois from Rockford in the north to Carbondale in the south, from Chicago in the east to the Quad Cities on the west, and everywhere in between.
- Extended our Faith & Freedom Initiative to include a guide to LGBT-inclusive religious practices, nearly 400 signatories to the Illinois Marriage Equality Faith Petition, scores of supportive clergy eager to perform civil union ceremonies, and the interfaith Equality Prayer Breakfast.
- Lobbied on nearly 30 separate pieces of federal and state legislation including repeal of the discriminatory federal Defense of Marriage Act, protection of LGBT family rights in the Illinois General Assembly and stronger bullying prevention policies in our schools. We also began the groundwork on building legislative support for full marriage equality.
- Participated in the LGBT Immigrant Rights Coalition to ensure the rights of LGBT immigrants and their loved ones.
- Scored a goal with the partnership with the Chicago Fire of Major League Soccer, the first formal partnership between a major sports franchise and an LGBT organization.
- Tracked the first year of the Civil Union Law. Equality Illinois found that nearly 5,000 couples received a civil union license in 92 percent of Illinois



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counties but also issued a special report highlighting how the law was falling short in providing full equality.

- Worked with allied organizations on transgender-friendly policies in Illinois and nationally
- Published the Law Firm Best Practices Manual and recognized 37 Illinois law firms leading the way in providing a safe and fair work environment for LGBT employees

Despite the general economic challenges, Equality Illinois grew its resources to \$1.148 million in fy2012 (ending June 30, 2012) from \$1.012 million in fy2011, a 13.4 percent increase.

"Our educational efforts reached unprecedented levels," Cherkasov wrote in the report. "We organized family picnics in religious congregations and educational forums in community centers; we engaged prospective allies at local festivals and geared up for the first marriage equality booth at the State Fair. We helped good employers become even better by adopting inclusive practices, such as gross-up benefits and gender transition guidelines. We held public and private actors accountable for full implementation of the civil union law. Throughout the year, we managed to extend our reach to every single county in the state."

Cherkasov noted, however, that "so much still remains to be done." This looks like it will be the year to attempt to pass marriage equality in the state legislature and to try to add gender identity to the Illinois hate crimes statute. Equality Illinois will also work to ensure every school district implements a comprehensive anti-bullying policy.

To achieve such goals, the organization has hired new field staff and is opening two new offices. Equality Illinois will continue to gather postcards and petitions on behalf of marriage equality, enlist more clergy across Illinois in the battle for fairness, and build broader coalitions with students, labor unions, non-LGBT focused community groups, small businesses and organizations seeking racial, immigrant and economic justice. Equality Illinois also called on its members to continue to write letters, make telephone calls, register voters, educate neighbors and raise crucial dollars.

"We will need to intensify those efforts the closer we are to our goals," Cherkasov said.

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