

NAACP Leader Denounces Anti-Gay Amendment

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by 365Gay.com Newscenter Staff

National NAACP chair Julian Bond has joined the growing number of notables opposing amending the Virginia constitution to ban same-sex marriage.

The measure also would nix civil unions and likely void domestic partner benefits in the state.

"I'd always thought Virginia was for lovers, not against them," Bond told a forum at the University of Virginia where he is a professor. "We believe it is always wrong to use a constitution to single out one group for discrimination."

The forum was sponsored by the Office of African-American Affairs and the LGBT Resource Center of the Office of Student Life.

It was the first time the two had co-sponsored an event and for Bond it was an opportunity to draw the connection between LGBT and African American civil rights.

"Marriage is a civil right," he said. "If you don't want gay people to marry in your church, good for you. But you can't say they can't marry in your city."

A Mason-Dixon poll taken in the summer showed that 54 percent support the amendment while 40 percent said they would vote against it. But a Washington Post poll last month showed that the margin of support for the amendment shrinks when people learn the wide implications beyond marriage that the amendment would have.

Asked if they would support an amendment barring same-sex marriage 53 percent of voters said yes and 43 percent said they would oppose it. But, when respondents to the survey were read the arguments made by groups fighting the amendment - that it would block civil unions and likely void domestic partner benefits for same and opposite-sex couples the gap narrowed to a virtual tie the Post found.

Forty-eight percent said they would still support the measure and 47 percent opposed it. The numbers fall well within the poll's margin of error of three percentage points.

The survey also found that Virginians are virtually split on whether gay couples should be able to form civil unions and whether they should be allowed to have benefits such as health insurance and inheritance and other legal rights similar to those of married couples.

Supporters of the amendment have been targeting African American churches for support in passing the amendment.

Bond is a longtime supporter of LGBT rights. This weekend he will receive the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force will present its National Leadership Award at a ceremony in Miami.

The number of well known Virginians opposing the amendment because of its breadth - it would affect all non married couples - is growing. Last week Gov. Tim Kaine became the 200th noted attorney to sign a statement opposing the proposed amendment.

Business groups and several chambers of commerce, mainly in more liberal northern Virginia have also voiced their opposition, saying the amendment would impede companies from attracting the best workers.

Earlier this week the Virginia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics announced its opposition to the amendment.

In a statement the academy said the amendment would create two classes of children and that children raised in gay households would especially suffer because the law would only recognize a birth or adoptive parent. If something happened to that parent, the other person in the relationship would have no rights to the child.