

Pride parade marred by lewd incidents

by Loren King
Bay Windows staff

In the wake of controversy surrounding Boston's Gay Pride parade where one man exposed himself while walking on stilts and a group of women simulated sex acts while riding on a movable bed, at least one lawyer and activist says calls for arrests are an overreaction, since nudity is not illegal.

The flashing incident is being investigated by the police. No charges had been filed as of press

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Event marred by controversy

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time.

In stories in both of Boston's daily newspapers, The Boston Globe and the Boston Herald, it was reported that City Council President James M. Kelly "demanded to know why arrests were not made" at the June 8 parade. The Globe on June 12 stated that Mayor Thomas Menino has warned that "anyone making such displays in future marches will be arrested."

But Don Gorton, a gay lawyer and head of the state's Anti-Violence Project which works closely with local police departments, said the Boston police acted appropriately and within the bounds of the law by not arresting those parade participants whose behavior may have lacked taste, but was not illegal, he said.

"Display of genitals is indecent exposure (a misdemeanor), not open and gross lewdness," Gorton said. "The police cannot arrest someone for a misdemeanor unless they witness it or unless the public order is threatened."

Police and Pride organizers say the Pride parade was peaceful and there were no disruptions.

Boston Police spokesman Lt. Robert O'Toole told the Boston Globe June 12 that police officers would have had to make "judgment calls" on whether or not to make arrests if they witness questionable behavior at the parade.

Gorton added that the display of female breasts — which apparently did

occur at the march — is not illegal. "Women going topless is perfectly lawful conduct," Gorton said, stressing that the law specifically states "genitals."

Parade organizers have repeatedly stated in the media that they regret the actions of the few parade participants whose behavior has elicited jeers.

"These people are responsible for taking away from the most successful Pride celebration Boston has ever had," said Pride co-chair Sabrina Taylor. "They have set us back as a community. We are very disappointed."

Members of the Pride Committee were scheduled to meet June 12 with representatives of the mayor's office and the police department to discuss guidelines for next year's march.

Gorton said it would be perfectly acceptable for Pride parade organizers in the future to condition permits to prohibit risqué behavior, and to monitor the event more stringently. But for elected officials to call for arrests is a different matter, he said, adding that he sees "a strain of homophobia lurking beneath" the outrage "because these [objectionable] people were so unrepresentative of the parade," Gorton said.

"Anytime you have a parade with 150,000 people, there's going to be some disorderly conduct. Public drunkenness is a problem at most events, but was not a problem at Gay Pride. Clearly there is some distorted perspective being applied," he said. ▼

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