

August 28, 2006

States Addressing Gay Domestic Violence

By Lisa Leff, The Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO – Even though his scalp would be bloodied from getting slammed against a door or his neck splotted with fingerprint-shaped bruises, Patrick Letellier’s injuries were often dismissed as nothing more than rough “sex play.”

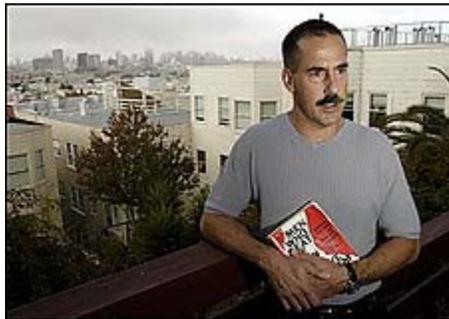
Back then, there were no shelters for battered gay men or domestic violence services for homosexuals. And police were often not inclined to get involved in household disputes involving same-sex couples.

“I got really good at hiding things and wore long pants and long-sleeve shirts,” said Letellier, a 43-year-old journalist from San Francisco.

Nearly 20 years later, as gays and lesbians have achieved greater recognition, so too has the darker side of same-sex relationships.

After years of fighting what one service provider called an “invisible epidemic,”

lawmakers and government agencies are taking steps to abandon the assumption that spousal abuse does not occur in couples of the same gender.



Patrick Letellier, an advocate against gay domestic violence, holds a book he wrote about his experiences in an abusive relationship. Thursday, Aug. 24, 2006, at his home in San Francisco.

(AP Photo/Benjamin Sklar)
(Benjamin Sklar - AP)

The California Legislature is considering a law requiring gays and lesbians who register as domestic partners to pay \$23 toward domestic violence programs aimed at same-sex couples. If it passes as expected, the measure would be the first of its kind in the nation.

The proposed fee mirrors a similar surcharge on California marriage licenses that funds battered women’s shelters and other domestic violence services. The measure also would require the state to train law enforcement and social service agencies on gay domestic violence, and to make sure that gay representatives are included on committees that dispense domestic violence grants.

In New York state, where same-sex couples do not have domestic partner or civil union status, advocates are pushing a bill to dedicate money for domestic violence programs that serve a gay clientele.

They also want to win same-sex couples access to family courts, making it easier for battered gays to obtain restraining orders against their abusers, said Clarence Patton, of the New York-based National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs.

In the absence of government mandates, a growing network of nonprofit agencies that specialize in same-sex domestic violence has sprung up in cities like Boston; Columbus, Ohio; Houston; Kansas City; and Tucson, Ariz. Many police departments also have started training officers to know how to respond to gay or lesbian victims.

A 2003 survey by Patton's organization of 10 U.S. cities and Toronto reported 6,523 cases of same-sex domestic violence, including six homicides. That was a 13 percent increase from the year before, but the number is assumed to represent a fraction of the true number of incidents.

Like many victims, Letellier took years to summon the courage to recognize himself as a victim of domestic violence.

Copyright © 2006 Associated Press.