

Open Letter to our Members and Friends

From: **roymelani@comcast.net**

Sent: Thu 4/22/10 9:35 AM

To: board@nagaaasoftball.org

Hello everyone,

Here is our first response to the events of this week. We would like you to make it available to your membership. It will also be on our website.

thanks!

NAGAAA Board

April 21, 2010

AN OPEN LETTER TO OUR MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

Dear Members and Friends,

On April 20th, 2010, the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) filed a lawsuit with the U.S. District Court in the state of Washington against NAGAAA on behalf of their clients LaRon Charles, Jon Russ and Steven Apilado of San Francisco. The suit claims, among other things that these men were discriminated against for being heterosexual, as players for the team D2 at the 2008 Gay Softball World Series event in Seattle Washington. The NCLR, and plaintiffs are seeking in excess of \$225,000 for “emotional distress”, etc., plus attorney fees. The lawsuit also demands that NAGAAA rewrite it’s rules of member participation to reflect the views of NCLR, and demands that NAGAAA award the team D2 the championship trophy for that event. We believe they are in error, and contend that there has been no wrong-doing, and the case is unfounded.

In 1977 NAGAAA was founded as a private organization with the mission of fostering a safe place for Gay/Lesbian softball players to play and compete in softball. We believe that team sports can offer opportunities for personal enrichment, and a sense of community that

is not available otherwise. It is not unlike other groups whom choose to organize around a commonality such as the African American Softball Assoc., or the Native American Indian Softball Assoc. Our group recognizes that in the arena of team sports, homophobia is still all too common. Almost daily it seems, one hears or reads of another gay bashing, often resulting in fatal outcomes. These tragedies serve as a reminder of our mission to provide a safe place for Gay/Lesbian players to enjoy competition while not compromising their true identity.

Over the years the growth of our organization has been amazing. Currently we have 37 member cities. Our numbers vary, but roughly we represent 10,000 players who seek to enjoy spirited, friendly competition, *specifically* with other members of the gay/lesbian community, while enjoying some reasonable sense of security for their safety.

The annual Gay Softball World Series is our most exciting event. It brings together the best of our gay/lesbian athletes for competition. The event also hosts the annual Talent Show designed to raise money for local and national charities. We are proud to say that due to the generosity of our members over \$250,000 has been raised over the past 21 years. Recipients have included charities that support persons with HIV/AIDS, and breast cancer.

At its core, NAGAAA is a grass roots organization dedicated to providing a safe environment for gays and lesbians. We have no paid staff; we do not have large sums of money, nor a pool of talented lawyers. It saddens all of us that the NCLR, whom we view as members of our community, have chosen this destructive path. NAGAAA represents a diverse population, and as such there are legitimate differences of opinion among us. However, the action by the NCLR has forced these differences into the court system, rather than allowing our members the right to define who and what we are. One thing is clear, if NCLR is successful, the enormous monetary damages they seek will put our very existence in jeopardy. Regardless of the outcome, everyone loses here. There are no winners

We are just at the beginning of this difficult saga. The Board is committed to representing our organization to the best of our abilities. We are guided by the framework of our organizational charter, as written by you, our members. We commit to keeping you informed as this process continues. We believe that once the facts are discovered a very different story emerges from that which has been reported, and we hope that NCLR will join with us.

Finally we'd like to say Thank You to all those who have expressed support. It is truly appreciated. We'd like to say Thank You to our attorney, a lesbian, and a business women with a small staff, and an under-funded client (us.) To her we would say, Beth, please ignore the hate mail, please ignore the intimidation. The work you are doing is important. You are showing enormous courage, and we are eternally grateful.

Respectfully yours,

The NAGAAA Board.
