

Psychiatric board backs same-sex marriage in 14-1 vote Vote by APA trustees mirrors one in May by group's larger assembly

By DYANA BAGBY for Southern Voice
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The American Psychiatric Association's board of trustees voted July 31 to approve a position statement that supports civil marriage for same-sex couples. On May 22, the APA Assembly voted at its 158th annual meeting in Atlanta to approve the statement that reads: "In the interests of maintaining and promoting mental health, the APA supports the legal recognition of same-sex civil marriage with all rights, benefits and responsibilities conferred by civil marriage, and opposes restrictions to those same rights, benefits and responsibilities." The APA board vote makes the position statement official. The vote was 14 to 1 with two abstentions.

Dr. Jack Drescher, a New York City psychiatrist who heads the APA's Association of Gay & Lesbian Psychiatrists [*actually, I Chair the APA's Committee on GLB Issues--JD*], said the APA's decision was made so it could join other mental health groups in legal briefs for lawsuits challenging heterosexual-only marriage laws.

"APA can now take official positions in support of same-sex civil marriage. This new position statement is a natural outgrowth of APA's previous position on same-sex civil unions which passed in 2000," Drescher said.

In 1973, the APA removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders. The organization also has a history of opposing discrimination and supporting minority rights.

"Marriage is a stabilizing force in society and APA's position reflects its belief that providing the stability of marriage for same-sex couples and their families can only benefit all of society," Drescher said. Some members of the APA, the nation's top mental health organization, argued same-sex marriage is a cultural and political issue and not a medical issue. Drescher and others disagreed.

"There is abundant literature showing that discrimination adversely affects the mental health of minority groups who experience irrational stigma/discrimination," he said. "There is also a growing literature citing the mental health benefits of marriage for heterosexual couples. These are important mental health issues."