

Leroy S. Walker



Leroy S. Walker was a gay rights activist and attorney who helped lead a movement during the late 1970s and 1980s to protect the rights of gay men, lesbians, and people with AIDS in the workplace.

Born in Washington D.C. in 1941, Walker graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1962 and the New York School of Law in 1966.

Walker was very active in the gay community. He was founder and coordinator of the Gay and Lesbian Events Phone Line in Los Angeles and was a member of other human rights groups. Walker worked in various administrative positions in the State Department of Fair Employment and Housing.

In 1979, he was instrumental in convincing then Governor Jerry Brown to issue an executive order which protected gay state employees. In 1980, Walker was hired to enforce that executive order which barred the state government from job discrimination “against any individual based solely upon the individual’s sexual preference.”

In 1983, Walker left civil service and went into private practice – forming the largest all gay law firm in Los Angeles at that time. In this role, Walker successfully brought lawsuits advocating for the rights of gays and lesbians. In one case, he represented three gay students who alleged that Disneyland had violated their civil rights when a security guard told them that “touch dancing was reserved for heterosexual couples only.” The men dropped their lawsuit in 1989 after Disneyland officials pledged not to discriminate against same-sex couples.

He also was the lead attorney in a famous case which affirmed that employers could not discriminate against workers with AIDS. The case, filed on behalf of a Santa Barbara man, John E. Chadbourne, whose employer barred him from returning to work because they feared he would infect other employees with AIDS, was one of the first in the nation to address the workplace rights of people with AIDS.

Walker was a founding member of the California Employment Lawyers Association and the Los Angeles-area Legal Eagles, a forum for lawyers specializing in employment-related litigation. He also worked with attorney Thomas F. Coleman to help organize the Gay and Lesbian State Employees Association after Governor Brown issued the

executive order in 1979.

In 1993, Walker received the Stephen Kelber Courageous Advocate award from the Gay Rights Project of the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California.

Leroy Walker passed away in 2004 in Los Angeles at the age of 63.

References

Leroy Walker, 63; Lawyer Fought for Gay Rights - [Link](#)

UPenn Alumni Obituaries: Leroy S. Walker W'62 - [Link](#)

Longtime gay rights attorney Lee Walker dies - [Link](#)

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