

New leader for GLAD

By LAURA KIRITSY

April 14, 2005

After a lengthy search, Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders (GLAD) has hired Lee Swislow to be its new executive director. Swislow, most recently the vice president of Justice Resource Institute Health Programs, has extensive experience with nonprofits and has spent much of her career advocating for GLBT people and individuals living with HIV and AIDS.

"I don't think I could be more excited about being here at GLAD," said Swislow, during an interview at the organization's headquarters in downtown Boston. "We all know it's an amazing and historic moment for GLBT civil rights and so to be at GLAD, the organization that's right in the center of it, it's both thrilling and somewhat humbling."

Swislow joins the agency after serving five years at JRI Health, which provides a spectrum of health services to GLBT people and other underserved populations. Prior to JRI, she was the chief operating officer and chief nursing officer at the Cambridge Health Alliance. In taking the helm of GLAD, Swislow is filling a vacancy that has existed since former executive director Gary Buseck left the organization in January 2004. (Buseck has since returned to GLAD as the agency's legal director.)

She also comes to the agency during a period of growth spurred by GLAD's historic victory in *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health* in November 2003. Since that time, the organization's staff has grown from 16 to 23 people; more significantly its budget has increased from \$1.4 million in 2003 to \$2.6 million. Swislow said she plans to put some of those new resources to use strengthening GLAD's presence and connections to GLBT organizations in the other New England states.

While Swislow said that building on the success of *Goodridge* is one of her top priorities, she does not want the marriage issue to eclipse GLAD's other important work, particularly around discrimination against transgender people and individuals living with HIV/AIDS. Additionally, there are other critical issues related to GLBT civil rights that GLAD must continue to address, said Swislow, in areas like employment and family law.

She is also hopeful that GLAD can be helpful on a national level, given that the climate in parts of the country beyond New England is more hostile to GLBT rights - and, according to opponents of gay rights, a direct result of the advances GLBT advocates have made in Massachusetts. "I think in any struggle for civil rights ... you need to fight for what you want. There's going to be wins and there's going to be opposition," said Swislow, adding that she thought GLAD had a lot to offer groups around the country.

Swislow lives in Cambridge with her spouse Denise McWilliams, an attorney and former director of Gay and Lesbian Advocates and GLAD's AIDS Law Project.