Thousands show support of gays, lesbians at rally

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Sixteen-year-old Taylor Roe said she's seen the way her classmates at Holt High School taunt and joke about other students who are gay and lesbian.

And, she said, she thinks it's wrong.

Taylor and her mother, Sheri Eldred, joined thousands of members and supporters of Michigan's gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community Saturday at the Michigan Pride march and rally at the Capitol.

"I know a lot of gay people, and I really support them," Taylor said. "A lot of people at school look at them differently and treat them differently. I think that's wrong."

Marchers snaked through the streets of downtown Lansing, many of them carrying signs and sporting rainbow-themed gear, such as wigs, socks, shirts, umbrellas and flags. Once at the Capitol, local leaders and gay rights activists spoke about such issues as gay marriage, second parent adoption and HIV and AIDS openness.

"It's a struggle against discrimination. It's a struggle against hatred," said Michelle Brown, co-director of Lansing-based Michigan Equality, a civil rights advocacy group for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals. "We must speak up. We must lift our voices. We must not sit idly by, so that at some point, equality will resound across this country."

David Jaques, 22, of West Bloomfield, and Patrick Gaulier, 21, of East Lansing, attended Saturday's event together. The couple met while students at Michigan State University a few years ago.

"I think it's an important way for the community to get some visibility because oftentimes we're an invisible minority," Jaques said.

"It's easy for us to kind of blend in and for people not to notice us if they so choose to."

At the rally, state Rep. Pam Byrnes, D-Lyndon Township, announced plans to introduce legislation that would pave the way for amending the state constitution to allow same-sex marriage.

"We're witnessing a dramatic sea change in public opinion," she told ralliers. "The attitude is changing. It is time to bring this matter before the Michigan voters again."

Two ministers ended the event with a mass commitment ceremony on the Capitol steps, during which gay and lesbian couples repeated vows and exchanged rings with their life partners.

Additional Facts
Lawmaker seeks to change state law
A Michigan lawmaker said Saturday she wants to change state law to recognize gay marriages.

The proposal announced by State Rep. Pam Byrnes faces an uphill climb. Michigan voters in 2004 passed a constitutional amendment defining marriage as a union between one man and one woman, effectively banning the legal recognition of same-sex marriage.

But Byrnes launched an effort to repeal that provision at the annual gay rights Michigan Pride event at the state Capitol.

The joint resolution by the Democrat from Washtenaw County's Lyndon Township would have to be approved by two-thirds of the Michigan Legislature before it would be put to voters in 2010.

Byrnes said same-sex couples deserve the same rights as opposite-sex couples in state law.

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