

SAVE Dade Rallies Community Against Ordinance Repeal

Town Meeting Kicks Off Campaign to Win Over Miami-Dade Voters

By Ian Drew

"Let's go out there and give 'em hell!" bellowed Miami Beach Tourism and Convention Director Michael Aller to a packed town meeting at Lincoln Road's Colony Theater on March 24.

Leaders and community members came together in support of political action group SAVE Dade.

Commissioner Ruth Shack who authored the original 1977 ordinance.

The 1977 ordinance was put into law to make discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation illegal. It was overturned in June of that year due to a now-infamous campaign led by Florida orange juice spokeswoman Anita Bryant.

In 1998, the new version of the human rights ordinance passed in a 7-6 vote.

On September 10, voters will again decide if they support the current amendment as a group called Take Back Miami-Dade has organized another referendum against the existing ordinance.

Governor Jeb Bush has ordered an investigation into the validity of signatures placed on the referendum after SAVE Dade challenged them.

The New York Times has called this referendum fight the "second battle of Miami," saying it is a "pitched battle that could charge the national political atmosphere."



SAVE Dade Executive Director Timothy Higdon addresses the SAVE Dade Crowd

The organization is leading the fight to bring down a referendum that has been added to the September 10 ballot that will

Miami-Dade County celebrated the 25th Anniversary of the original Dade County Human Rights Ordinance on

ask voters to remove the words 'sexual orientation' from the county's Human Rights Ordinance.

The protections stipulated in the 1998 law make it illegal to discriminate in employment, housing and public accommodations based on sexual orientation.

"This event is rallying to excite people and make them understand the importance of saying no on September 10," said Terrance Harmon, SAVE Dade Event Coordinator and System Administrator. "We are here to let people know that it is not right to discriminate against people because they are gay, and we are all under the same voice."

SAVE Dade has already identified over 25,000 registered voters who support the law, and they need to turn out 175,000 supportive voters on September 10 in order to successfully knock out the repeal.

Organizers hope to raise \$1.4 million and recruit 1,000 volunteers for extensive media and door-to-door campaigns to reach their goal.

"This fight is pivotal for the entire county, and the country," says SAVE Dade Executive Director Timothy Higdon. "It will set the tone of civil rights for the next 25 years in this country, and it ironically all started here 25 years ago. This is the opportunity of a lifetime to make a difference."

Besides Aller and Higdon, other leaders poignantly addressed the crowd, including attorney Elizabeth Schwartz, Miami-Dade African-American Chamber of Commerce Chair Jesse Brooks and Miami-Dade County Commissioner Katy Sorenson.

Sorenson, who led the fight to amend the ordinance in 1998, presented a personal check to SAVE Dade and pledged her own continued support.

Looking on from the audience was Sorenson's predecessor, former County

January 18, with the mayors of many cities, including Miami and Miami Beach, showing their support by declaring the date Human Rights Ordinance Day in their cities.

"Today celebrates 25 years since one of the defining moments for Dade County and one of the most important civil rights struggles of our time," said Miami Mayor Alex Penelas in his address to that assembly. "I have faith the community will stand behind [the ordinance] this time. We will protect all of our people against anyone who seeks to deny someone else their human and constitutional rights."

SAVE Dade also hosted a fundraiser in New York City for their effort on March 26.



Former County Commissioner Ruth Shack who authored the original 1977 ordinance attended the rally