

THE TENNESSEAN

NOVEMBER 4, 1998

Group: Vandals can't mar message

■ Billboard company will fix damage to sign honoring supporters of gays

By **ROB MORITZ**
Staff Writer

A billboard put up earlier this week by the Nashville Chapter of Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays, or PFLAG, to honor those who support gay and lesbian loved ones has been defaced.

Vandals sometime late Wednesday night or yesterday morning used long poles, paint rollers and black paint to mark out most of the words on the sign, which read, "Someone You Know and Love is Gay!"

The sign, located along Interstate 40 near the Charlotte Avenue exit, also had a phone number of PFLAG's local office. The number was painted over.

Gene Floyd, a member of PFLAG, noticed the vandalism yesterday morning and said she "was not really surprised."

"They think if they obliterate the message they obliterate the people," said Floyd, who has a son who is gay. "That's just not going to happen."

The Chicago company that owns the sign told PFLAG members they will clean up the vandalism and increase

CIVIL LIBERTIES

security around the billboard, Floyd said.

"It's extremely depressing that there are people who think they have the right answer to everything and no one else is allowed to express their opinion."

Hedy Weinberg, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union in Tennessee: "That's clearly vandalism of private property and should be punished. Obviously, everyone has the right to their own opinion, but this defacement is not only an illegal act but clearly sounds like an act based in hate and fear."

She said gay and lesbian groups have been targeted in recent months by right-wing groups.

"People who want to counter the message can do so with their own billboard, as they have done in newspapers," she said, noting that several newspapers in recent months have run anti-gay ads paid for by right-wing organizations.

"I think it's important ... as many times as possible to make sure the voices of gays and lesbians are heard. I think the message is important and the sign simply says that PFLAG focuses on families who are committed to their children and supports their children's decision to be gay and lesbian." ■