

# Lack of support kills Bill 185

By Amritha Alladi

Pacific Daily News

aalladi@guampdn.com

Vice Speaker Benjamin Cruz yesterday confirmed his push for Bill 185 had fizzled due to lack of support from the very people who would benefit from the bill's passage.

The bill, which would recognize domestic partnerships, including those involving same-sex couples, had been strongly opposed by Archbishop Anthony Apuron for several months, and showed frail support from other senators.

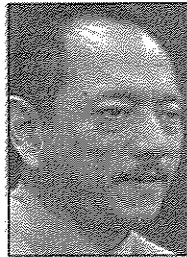
Earlier this month, Cruz said he wouldn't push for the bill if he knew it wouldn't garner the support it needed to pass, and yesterday, he said not enough people from the gay and lesbian community stood up openly to speak out on the bill and provide testimonials to the other senators—and that's why he believed the bill wouldn't pass.

In contrast to 7,000 petitions collected by the Archdiocese of Agaña urging senators to vote against the bill, members of the gay community didn't mobilize their support for the bill in the same way, Cruz said.

Officials with the archdiocese didn't respond to questions for comments yesterday.

Cruz said he expected the opposition, and he said he was ready to stand up against it. However, Cruz said he was disappointed that more people who supported the bill didn't speak out.

"I expected them to bring their significant others and others. People didn't believe that there were a large number of (gay) people out there," he said.



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Vice Speaker Benjamin Cruz

Unless he could show that there was a sizable group of "upstanding tax paying citizens" in the community, other senators weren't willing to "jeopardize their (own) standing," he said.

## Civil rights

On the other hand, family law attorney William Pesch said it's because people weren't willing to speak up that such a bill is necessary.

Pesch, who is openly gay, said most people he spoke to supported the bill, but few of them wanted to speak publicly for fear that they would lose their jobs or their families, he said.

"When people are afraid to assert their civil right for fear they will lose other civil rights, that to me demonstrates the need for this type of legislation," he said.

"There are people who are really, really afraid of losing their jobs, and I understand that. It's easier for me — I'm self employed — it's easier for me to be more open," he said.

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said.

Yet Pesch, too, expressed some disappointment to the lack of legislative support for the bill.

He said he and some others visited several of the senators in small groups: they spoke to Sens. Frank Aguon, Tom Ada, Frank Blas Jr., Tina Muna Barnes, Telo Taitague, James Espaldon, Speaker Judith Won Pat, and former Sen. Matt Rector.

"Senators Aguon, Rector, and Won Pat, had unqualified support," he remembered.

But now that Cruz is stepping back from the debate, neither Pesch nor Derick Hills, speaker of the Guam Youth Congress, think this issue will be picked up by any of the other lawmakers.

"I don't think most of our politicians have the intestinal fortitude to do what's right," Pesch said.

Masako Watanabe/Pacific Daily News/mwatanabe@guampdn.com

**Supporter:** Attorney Bill Pesch is photographed at his Hagåtña office yesterday. Pesch supports Bill 185, which lacks enough lawmakers' support for a vote in the Guam Legislature.

## SPEAK OUT

### Speaker Judith Won Pat

▲ Phone: (671) 472-3586/7/8  
▲ Fax: (671) 472-3589  
▲ E-mail: speaker@judiwonpat.com  
▲ Web site: [www.guamlegislature.com](http://www.guamlegislature.com)

### Vice Speaker Benjamin Cruz

▲ Phone: (671) 477-2520/1  
▲ Fax: (671) 477-2522  
▲ E-mail: senadotbjcruz@gmail.com  
▲ Web site: [www.senatorbjcruz.com](http://www.senatorbjcruz.com)

Above all, he said he was most disappointed with Taitague and Judith Guthertz, because both of them had suggested the issue be placed on the ballot for referendum, allowing the public to decide the issue.

"If we left civil rights to the majority, (Taitague and Guthertz) would not be able to vote let alone hold a seat in the Legislature," Pesch said, recalling the women's civil rights movement in 1920. "I'm very disappointed with them."

## Lost advocate

Hills said the gay community has lost an advocate for their civil rights.

"Our push for the bill dies when our advocate in the Legislature doesn't push it as well," Hills said, although he is thankful Cruz introduced the bill in the first place.

Pesch didn't think so.

Despite Cruz stepping back from the forefront of the debate surrounding Bill 185, Pesch said "the battle is not done."