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Kathryn Ritchie
University of Maine

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• Attorney general

Homophobic attack prompts third civil rights suit

By Kathryn Ritchie
Maine Campus staff

The Maine Attorney General's office announced yesterday that it has filed another civil rights lawsuit against a University of Maine student.

Kirk R. Daigle, 26, has been accused of threatening a fellow student based on his minority status.

According to the lawsuit, the incident began last Wednesday, Jan. 21, when an Estabrooke resident, referred to only as "John Smith," taped a "Maine Still Won't Discriminate" poster to his dormitory room door.

Two days later, at 2:30 a.m., Smith was awoken when Daigle entered his room and asked him if he was a "fag" and whether he

"sucked cock."

He then said: "Let me tell you something, John. I'm from Bangor and three of my best friends threw a fag off a bridge and now I come home and find this on your door."

Daigle was probably referring to the death of Charlie Howard, a Bangor man who was thrown off a Bangor bridge on July 7, 1984, by

three teenagers because he was gay.

Howard, 33, had been walking home with a friend from a lesbian and gay support group at the time of the attack. The boys were ages 14, 15 and 16 and were sentenced to the Maine Youth Center.

According to Smith, he continues to feel threatened by Daigle, who appeared to be intoxicated at

the time of the threat. Smith reported the incident to Public Safety in the morning.

Immediately after the announcement of the lawsuit, President Peter Hoff released comments decrying the situation.

"We take these situations very seriously and have made it clear to

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students and staff that should they feel discriminated against or threatened, we will intercede quickly," Hoff said in a press release.

"This particular allegation of bias is a good example of why, in my opinion, the governor and legislature acted responsibly last year when they supported passage of anti-discrimination legislation," Hoff said.

This civil rights lawsuit marks the third against a University of Maine student in as many months. Assistant Attorney General Stephen Wessler said the "silver lining" in all three civil rights cases has been the level of superb work by UMaine's Public Safety.

"They get (cases) to us quickly and they do the investigating," Wessler said. "They do a great job."

Daigle's alleged comments come only three weeks before the state is set to vote to repeal legislation which would ban discrimination based on sexual orientation.

While the situation was unfortunate, Wil-

de Stein alliance co-chair Kathleen Worcester said it might bring attention to the need to vote "no" in the Feb. 10 referendum. She said it was a perfect example of someone being discriminated against just because someone thought he was gay.

"It's very likely, percentage wise, that this person was not gay," Worcester said. "Yet they received discrimination for supporting legislation."

She said Wilde Stein has been working on the idea of having "safe zones" in dormitories. By having the question "What is your comfort level with living with someone who identifies as something other than heterosexual?" added to the UMaine housing application, people could be better paired up with roommates.

"(The "safe zone") would make parts of our community safe for the non-heterosexual community and their supporters without separating them from the rest of the community," Worcester said.