



Garcia speaks out in a fiery interview

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December 20, 2010

<http://chicago.gopride.com/news/article.cfm/articleid/15128884>

"I am the founder of the organization, they can't take that away from me."

CHICAGO, IL -- Rick Garcia is fired-up and speaking out in an interview about his release last week from [Equality Illinois](#), the organization he co-founded in 1992.

Garcia, who is a long-time LGBT advocate and lobbyist, is known to be expressly outspoken on matters of equity and fairness. He is also known for a sometimes brash style of delivering the message and in a new interview with the *Windy City Times*, his passion for the community and anger over his firing are evident.

"So he [EQIL CEO Bernard Cherkasov] fired me 10 days after we passed a civil-unions bill that only six states have," Garcia tells the *Times*. "He fires me."

Cherkasov gave Garcia, who served as the organization's Public Policy Director, the news at the EQIL offices in Lakeview on Thursday, Dec. 16, just before the two were set to host a civil unions forum at the [Center on Halsted](#).

"I sat there across from him, less than 10 days from passing a civil-unions bill in Illinois. Passing a statewide gay-rights bill in the state of Illinois, in 2005, giving state employees domestic-partner benefits, allowing lesbians to have in vitro fertilization covered by their insurers. And excuse my language, it's really rude, OK—and this bitch is going to dismiss me. I don't think so. I do not think so."

Garcia doesn't intend to go quietly and he returned to the [Equality Illinois](#) offices the next morning, Dec. 17. When Garcia refused to leave, Cherkasov called Chicago police.

"Well, I went to the office. I walked in. He looked shocked that I was there. He did not think that I was going to come in. And then he said, Well, we all have to leave to go to the Christmas party. I said, "Well, have fun." "Well, we can't leave you here, in an unlocked office." He says, to the founder, the founder of that mother-fucking office. "We can't leave you in here with an unlocked door." I said, "Well, call the police." And he did, and four police officers came, and of course they all know me from the neighborhood. You know, it's all really nasty and it doesn't have to be nasty. And he's making it nasty. And that's the thing."

Cherkasov, who has not spoken publicly about Garcia's release, issued a short statement last week saying, "Rick is a passionate advocate who has done a lot for our movement, and we wish him every success in his future endeavors."

The *Windy City Times* asked Garcia if he thought his firing was related to his outspoken and frank comments related to the controversies at [Howard Brown Health Center](#).

"Well, I will tell you this. I do know that Jamal [Edwards, the new head of HBHC] and Paul Fairchild [former HBHC development director] complained to Bernard about me. And that's where much of this began."

Garcia said he would continue his advocacy work and will fight the firing.

"I don't care what this crazy megalomaniac CEO or whatever he's called, I don't care about the idiot president of our board because that chap is such an idiot ... I don't care what they think. Because I know that people need help and people need protection now."

Since moving to Chicago in 1986, Garcia has remained a high-profile activist. He was a principal founder of the [Illinois Federation for Human Rights](#), which is now known as [Equality Illinois](#). His advocacy was recognized in 1999 by his induction into the Chicago Gay & Lesbian Hall of Fame and by a 2009 Vanguard Award from the Chicago Bar Association.

"I am the founder of the organization, they can't take that away from me," concluded Garcia.

[Read the full interview](#) with Rick Garcia by Yasmin Nair for the Windy City Times.