

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB: 7395:
AN ACT CONCERNING MARRIAGE EQUALITY**

ANNA HELLER

Hello, name is Anna Heller. I am 39 years old and a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. I was born and raised in Willimantic, Connecticut.

Growing up with a lesbian mom, I never would have thought that I would be standing in front of the state legislature testifying about my life and the lives of millions of people who are fighting for marriage equality. Back then, there were no books, no TV shows, no Ellen, or Queer Eye for the Straight Guy. In all the years that have passed, so much has changed, yet children who grew up in families like mine continue to fight being stigmatized by a government that will not allow our parents to marry.

Nineteen years ago in Willimantic, my sister and I, with four other people co-founded COLAGE-- Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere. Today it is a national organization with over 12,000 members. It is an organization that has chapters all over the country, with pen pals, newsletter publications, activism and supportive networks. It is a privilege to be speaking here today on behalf of these wonderful children of same-sex parents.

My work with COLAGE, in addition to my own life experience, gives me insight into how children in gay and lesbian families feel about marriage equality. Can you imagine what it might be like for a child whose parents are not allowed to be married? It means not talking about very basic daily life events with your friends. This is how I grew up. Even today with all the progress we have made, we are still told that we are not the same.

Marriage is an institution that is sanctioned by our community and culture. Children need to feel a part of that community-- supported, connected and completely accepted by society. And children also need to feel that they have families that are just like everyone else-- that our government recognizes, protects, and includes us, too. The fact that our families must use different language to describe our parents' relationship is so stigmatizing for us. The word "partner" does not carry the same meaning as "spouse." I can tell you that these titles make A BIG DIFFERENCE.

I am baffled to be here today to be defending the rights of two people who love each other to get the same civil rights and legal status as a man and a woman. How does one explain to their children that the state forbids them to be married and refuses to recognize their family as worthy of all the rights and privileges of other families?