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***Judiciary Committee Hearing
H.B. 7395 An Act Concerning Marriage
Public Testimony submitted by Alice Pritchard, PhD. Executive Director,
Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund
March 26, 2007***

My name is Alice Pritchard and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Women's Education & Legal Fund (CWEALF). CWEALF is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to empowering women, girls and their families to achieve equal opportunities in their personal and professional lives. Historically, CWEALF has successfully worked to stop gender discrimination in many areas. The ongoing fight against discrimination is now facing a new battle: discrimination in marriage.

CWEALF supports House Bills 7395 because marriage rights for same-sex couples would (1) prevent the further spread of discrimination and prejudice toward lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender individuals, (2) benefit same-sex couples and their children, and thus (3) create stronger communities for same-sex and opposite-sex families alike.

Same-sex marriage rights would help prevent the spread of discrimination and prejudice to future generations. The effects of marriage discrimination, like other forms of discrimination, are far reaching. Marriage discrimination sends a strong message that same-sex couples are second class citizens. This message has countless repercussions, particularly given the increasing number of same-sex couples with children. For example, gay youth suicide rates are up,¹ and studies show that social prejudice and discrimination against lesbians and gay men has had a cumulative toll on their well being. In addition to psychological harm, the perpetuation of discrimination and prejudice leads to increased violence associated with hate crimes which place the LGBT community at risk of physical harm.²

Not only would same-sex marriage help prevent the spread of discrimination, it would also provide same-sex couples many tangible *and intangible* benefits. In terms of tangible benefits, there are over 588 state-sanctioned civil marriage rights and responsibilities that couples of the same-sex are not entitled to, simply because of their gender. In addition to these legal rights, same-sex couples derive a social benefit from the removal of the perceived second-class status of civil-unions and gain comfort in having access to a title for their relationship that is unambiguous and recognizable.

Equal marriage rights also benefit the children of same-sex couples because children of unmarried parents suffer many financial and social disadvantages as compared with children of married parents. For example, same-sex families must pay extra money to go through legal proceedings to gain rights that would automatically be conferred through marriage. Time and money spent on these types of efforts means

¹ LMF website

² APA Briefing Sheet on Same-Sex Families and Relationships.

less energy and fewer resources for other important expenses and investments such as the child's education, clothing and recreation. As the court held in Goodridge, there is an "inherent contradiction ...[in] allow[ing] same-sex couples to establish legal relationships with their children but not with each other."³

Finally, preventing the spread of prejudice to future generations and supporting more children and families through same-sex marriage would in turn create stronger communities. Families formed around marriage encourage stability and thus create an essential "building block" of society.

Civil Unions do not provide equal rights to members of the LGBT community. Although Civil Unions provide same-sex couples with some of the *functional* benefits of marriage, they do not provide equal rights to same sex couples because marriage, by any other name, is not marriage. Civil Unions are not an adequate remedy because this "compromise," ignores the *intangible, social benefits* that are derived from granting the official label of "marriage" on two people. This type of functionalism "perpetuates the second-class status of same-sex couples, leaving them uncertain as to their rights and responsibilities and denying them the symbolic 'recognition of shared humanity' that accompanies the legalization of marriage."⁴

In sum, CWEALF urges your support of House Bill 7395 to provide equal access to marriage for same-sex couples because marriage is a basic right, and civil unions are not an adequate remedy. To deny same-sex couples the right to marry harms the couples, their families and in turn, their Connecticut communities, and the state as a whole.

³ Goodridge v. Department of Public Health

⁴ Note, *Inching Down the Aisle: Differing Paths Toward the Legalization of Same-Sex Marriage in the United States and Europe*, 116 Harv. L. Rev. 2004, 2021 (2003) [hereinafter "*Inching*"].