

Testimony of John de la Roche in Support of HB7395:
An Act Concerning Marriage Equality

March 26, 2007

EQUALITY

I'm a gay man, born and raised in the great state of Connecticut. This is my home. My partner and I have been together for 15 years. We share a beautiful home on which we pay substantial property taxes to the state of Connecticut. We both have careers; we vote and have exactly the same lifestyle as our heterosexual neighbors.

Two years ago, so much time was spent by this committee exploring the ways that same-sex unions are different from marriage in order to justify the segregation that has been imposed on us by the creation of Civil Union. The fact is, there isn't any difference to be found. There is no such thing as a "gay lifestyle" any more than we can presume that there is such a thing as a "heterosexual lifestyle". No one knows all of the reasons why people get married. I do, however, know for certain that the variety of reasons is the same for heterosexual and homosexual adults.

CIVIL UNION IS SEGREGATION

We deserve equality under state and federal law. Instead, we've been asked to accept, no, to celebrate segregation as a compromise and an historical leap forward. Unless you believe that religious or popular belief should supersede the Bill of Rights, your duty is to ensure that all citizens are treated equally, not by separate standards for select minority groups.

What if this were you? How might you feel to have your relationship with your beloved spouse referred to as a "heterosexual relationship" instead of a marriage. Imagine having people refer to your spouse as "your friend" instead of your spouse.

How often do any of you have to show your marriage license to prove your relationship; that is, carry it along with several other legal documents with you like a driver's license in case of emergency? You don't have to think about any of those things. You say you're married and all is understood and accepted, no proof, no discussion required.

I'd imagine if you were in my situation you'd feel insulted and angry a great deal of the time. I can understand that because that's exactly how I feel.

My partner and I have chosen not to have a civil union. We would no sooner support this segregation than we would have submitted to ride in the back of a public bus in Alabama in 1955. Segregation is demeaning and the wrong direction for Connecticut and for America. Segregation is not equal. It is never an acceptable solution. If civil union were equal to marriage, it would be called marriage.

Defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman is not a definition at all. It's a statement of exclusion used to justify segregation. What other minority group could be substituted in this situation and be asked to accept a segregated, "alternative" institution of any kind?

SEPARATE CHURCH AND STATE

The institution of Marriage under question here ceased to be a religious rite the day that the state began issuing civil marriage licenses. In this ongoing debate I have witnessed a fundamental lack of separation of church and state. Personal and religious beliefs of legislators and the majority view of your constituents were routinely allowed to be entered as valid arguments in the making of Connecticut state law. These arguments were routinely accepted as if they should supersede the Bill of Rights. Religious convictions belong in church, not in a discussion of civil rights within the Judiciary committee.

Legislating according to the popular opinion of your constituents is also not justification for creating segregation. Would desegregation of public schools have ever taken place if left to a public referendum? The Supreme Court decision that declared that separate is never equal was very unpopular at the time. Still, justice prevailed over religious and popular opinions as I hope it will in this legislative session.

Our Bill of Rights guarantees that my rights will never be subject to popular referendum or religious beliefs of legislators. It guarantees that my equality does not need to wait for answers to rhetorical questions about how people become homosexual or how we rectify differences in various religious beliefs and traditions. The Bill of Rights must take precedence over your personal beliefs and the beliefs of your constituents, even if they are in a majority.

No one is asking you to compromise your beliefs or to change the institution of Marriage. I am asking that you separate your religious and personal beliefs and those of your constituents when legislating civil law. Please exercise your role as government officials in this civil matter to uphold the Bill of Rights and end this segregation of people based on their sexual orientation. I am asking you to end the segregation of same-sex couples by extending the basic human right of civil marriage to all couples equally.

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