

Testimony of Laura Minor

In support of HB 7395: An Act Concerning Marriage Equality

March 26, 2007



That's me, the happy Justice of the Peace, with Troy and Scott. I was thrilled to perform their beautiful civil union ceremony.

My name is Laura Minor, and I am a Justice of the Peace in the city of Bristol. I am here today to testify in favor of justice, fairness, and equality--about love and the basic rights of my gay and lesbian fellow Nutmeggers.

When I get a call from a couple, same sex or different sex, asking me to perform a civil union or wedding ceremony, it is always a pleasure. I hear giggles and laughter and shyness and joy as they tell me that they want me to perform this special ceremony so that they can share their lives together legally as a couple forever.

There is nothing so uplifting as helping two people find the right words to create a ceremony that is uniquely theirs, then witnessing their vows and declaring them united forever.

If I gave you a transcript of the wedding vows written for civil unions and those for weddings and took out the awkward words - civilly-joined life partners - and replaced them with the ones we associate with weddings - spouse, married, etc.- you would not be able to tell the difference between a ceremony between two men or two women and one for a man and a woman.

The ceremonies themselves are the same--the glowing eyes, the blushing cheeks, the beautiful words spoken, the promises of love, the smiles, the tears, the hugs of family and friends. There is no difference in the love that a same-sex couple shares during their civil union and the love that is shared by the heterosexual couple on their wedding day.

But we in Connecticut have two separate kinds of ceremonies to join those in love.

Why must the state distinguish between these two ceremonies by calling one marriage and one a civil union? They are not equal under the law and this distinction creates a second class status for same-sex couples. Quite simply, civil unions do not equal marriage.

I understand completely that certain religious groups don't believe in same-sex marriage and can't condone it. That is their right. But this isn't about religious marriage. It's about civil marriage. It's about a legal status determined by you, our elected officials who work under the great American value of the separation of church and state.

As a JP, I can perform a beautiful ceremony that contains religious elements if the couple chooses to include them, but I am performing a civil ceremony, not a religious one.

Last fall, I performed a beautiful ceremony for Troy and Scott, a couple very much in love. Troy and Scott wanted very little from me in the way of suggestions for their ceremony. I was there to make it official. They had chosen their own words and each had created his own vow to love and cherish the other. There wasn't a dry eye in the room.

Troy and Scott are now faced with a challenge. Scott has been offered a great job in Washington, DC. I was excited for them when I heard. I told them that I knew of a wonderful house in Maryland that was available, an easy commute into the city. Troy told me that they will have to live in DC itself - not because they choose to but because DC honors domestic partnerships and Troy will be able to have health benefits through Scott's job. This will not be possible if they choose to live in Maryland.

Can you imagine this happening to a married man and woman? Why do these devoted gay couples have to make these kinds of decisions to cobble together rights and protections, while accepting a status that is less than equal? Couples with a Connecticut civil union Connecticut face similar decisions all the time—if they vacation, travel, or move out of state, they have no legal standing together, and their relationships are not protected.

Can't Connecticut be a place where all couples are treated equally under the law, with all the rights, protections, *and* respect that they deserve? My dream is for gay and lesbian couples to be able to live here knowing that their government regards them as true equals.

I believe God loves all of us. I know that same sex couples love each other in the same way that a man and woman love each other.

I urge you to remove this arbitrary and unreasonable barrier from allowing gay and lesbian couples to experience the same legal status as heterosexual couples. I urge you to pass this bill. Civil marriage is about civil rights, not about religious choices. Thank you.

Laura Minor

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