

Judiciary Committee, Connecticut General Assembly

HB 7395: AAC Marriage Equality

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924-6 Quinnipiac Avenue, New Haven, Connecticut

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Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Michael Morand. I reside with my life partner, Frank Mitchell, in New Haven. Like many couples, we cover multiple duties. While I take this personal day to testify on our behalf, Frank is the breadwinner, working in Fairfield.

Today is a special day for us. Eighteen years ago to the day, at this very hour, on March 26, 1989, we had our first date – a picnic after Easter Sunday services.

For 18 years we have built our life together as a couple and as contributing citizens. I work for Connecticut's oldest university, where I earned a master of divinity degree. Frank is a public historian, working with public television, schools, historical societies, and museums across the state.

Among us, we have served on the boards of our local land trust, public library, chamber of commerce, arts council, and others. We can serve our community because we support each other with a home that is a foundation for us to be active citizens.

I have had the privilege of being a public servant at various times, as an alderman, a member of the State Judicial Selection Commission, and a justice of the peace.

In that latter capacity, I conducted civil marriage ceremonies – including some where one partner was entering a second, or even third, marriage.

Isn't it odd – the State allows me to officiate at the marriage of straight people, even divorced ones, but denies me and other gay citizens an equal right to civil marriage.

Thanks to this Committee's leadership, Connecticut has made tremendous progress towards equality as the first state to extend by legislative act most of the protections, benefits, and obligations of civil marriage through the civil union legislation passed in 2005.

But the status quo in the State of Connecticut remains separate and unequal.

Equality, both as fundamental value and as a legal concept, can never be defined as partial. It is time for our State to complete its work and adopt marriage equality.

Equality threatens no one. The experience of our neighbors in Massachusetts and Canada is proof that marriage equality for lesbians and gay men does not hurt the straight people.

Equality threatens no religion. Frank and I met in church. We were both in church yesterday. I graduated from parochial middle school, Jesuit high school, and the Yale Divinity School, and am familiar with biblical texts and tradition. As historian Stephanie Coontz noted in the Courant a week ago, polygamy was the form of marriage “mentioned most often in the first five books of the Old Testament”, while Jesus “urged his followers to remain unmarried or leave their families to go off and spread the Christian word.”¹ “True” believers might use caution before invoking scripture or tradition to deny gay people basic equality.

Moreover, for those who wish the church to establish State policy, the United Church of Christ, direct descendant of the founding and established church of Connecticut, has a clear position on gay marriage: it supports marriage equality enthusiastically and unequivocally.

Everyone wins when equality wins. Chief Justice Margaret Marshall of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, who earned her law degree in Connecticut, wrote that “the history of constitutional law ‘is the story of the extension of constitutional rights and protections to people once ignored or excluded.’”²

Like millions of gay Americans, I know what it is like to be ignored and excluded. I felt fear and shame as a kid because I had been born gay. When I came out to a friend at home when I was 19, word spread quickly. The reaction by my peers was swift: I was cut off and cut out by my friends. It took me years to have the fortitude to come out to my parents. I look back on those years of covering as time terribly wasted.

Connecticut has been a good place for Frank and me to make a home because it has been progressive in providing basic rights and protections. As we mark 18 years together, we urge you to take the next step and enact marriage equality.

By this simple act, you will give hope to teenagers in Wallingford and West Haven, Goshen and Groton, Danbury and Darien, and all across our state and beyond who are afraid, cut off, and cut out like I was as a teenager. Your vote for equality gives them hope and tells them they are normal and share equally in the protections, benefits, and obligations of other citizens.

The only thing they have to look forward to is hope. And you have to give them hope. Hope for a better world, hope for a better tomorrow. Hope that all will be right.³

Thank you.

¹ ‘Traditional Marriage’ Isn’t As Straightforward As All That, guest editorial in the Hartford Courant, Sunday, March 18, 2007, by Stephanie Coontz the Evergreen State College and author of “Marriage, A History: How Love Conquered Marriage” (Viking, 2006).

² *Goodridge v. Dept. of Public Health*, 798 N.E.2d 941 (Mass. 2003).

³ Adapted from the “hope speech” by Harvey Milk, San Francisco Supervisor assassinated in 1978.