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**Testimony on Bill 7395: AAC Marriage Equality
Judiciary Committee
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Submitted By: Stephen Karp, MSW Executive Director

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Connecticut chapter, representing over 3500 members we offer this testimony in support of Bill 7395: AAC Marriage Equality.

Two years ago Governor Rell signed into law the right for same-sex persons to enter into civil union. This was a step forward in recognizing the rights of gay and lesbian couples under the law, however, civil union is by definition separate and not equal. NASW asserts that although civil unions mark a step forward, it is simply not enough.

One of the founding principles of the social work profession is that of social justice, that being the belief that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities. In 2004, NASW's Board of Directors reaffirmed the Association's support for same-sex marriages, and strongly opposes any discrimination against same-sex couples. We believe anything less than full marriage is a form of discrimination. HB 7395 removes discriminatory language about marriage by inserting the language that 'marriage means the union of two persons'. NASW applauds the Judiciary Committee for raising this bill.

Discriminatory practices regarding the institution of marriage have been practiced over the course of history, only to be discredited over time. The Eugenics movement in the late 1800's justified the prohibition of marriage of people with disabilities. African American marriages were not recognized in all states until after the Civil War. Laws in at least four states (North Carolina, Nevada, Arizona, and Oregon) prohibited sexual relations between American Indians and whites. Currently, more than 30 states still either prohibit or restrict marriage between people with developmental disabilities. For us these restrictions have come to be unthinkable yet the barriers to same sex marriage remain, though the validity for denial of same sex marriage is as false as was the restrictions on inter-racial marriage or between persons with developmental disabilities.

Similarly, discriminatory assertions regarding same sex parenting continue to exist, despite rigorous scientifically sound research that concludes that no credible evidence shows that children raised by lesbian or gay parents differ in important respects from those raised by heterosexual parents. It is the quality of parenting that matters. The only way that children of gay marriages may be negatively affected is by their understanding of the importance of marriage and being made to feel that their family is not as good or respected as a heterosexual family. This is not due to being a part of a gay or lesbian family, but rather is a product of the state's policy of prohibiting same sex marriage.

Any time that a specific group is singled out for treatment that is less than fully equal to that of the rest of society we are, intentionally or not, making a statement as to the worth placed on that population. When public policy discriminates against a specific group we send a message, subtle or not, that it is acceptable for others to practice discrimination against the same individuals. The denial of same sex marriage is exactly this kind of discrimination that leaves the door open to other kinds of denial of rights, many of which are tied directly to the status of marriage.

There are those who will come before the Judiciary Committee today to tell you that Bill 7395 will destroy the sanctity of marriage and ruin the institution of marriage. The same argument was made against inter-racial marriage and inter-faith marriage and yet the institution of marriage survived. Change may not come easily for everyone but that is not a reason to deny needed change.

Undeniably, same sex couples are in committed relationships, parent children and constitute the definition of family. They live in relationships that are based on basic principles of strong and loving commitment to another, responsibility, and a right to enter into a marriage with their partner of choice, yet they continue to be denied the same status afforded heterosexual couples and heterosexual parents. Bill 7395 promotes social justice and equality and we urge the Judiciary Committee to take the first step toward same sex marriage equality by voting yes on An Act Concerning Marriage Equality.