

Testimony of the Rev. Michael F. Ray in Support of HB 7395:

An Act Concerning Marriage Equality

I support this legislation, first as a U.S. citizen and resident of Connecticut – one who has been taught and who believes that “All...are created equal”. “ALL” (not just some) have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”.

As a Southern white male I know what it is to be privileged. As a gay man, deeply closeted for a time, I also know what it is to be denied those rights. When a significant part of “who one is by birth” is rejected or negated, cut off and hidden deeply away there can be no true life, no real liberty, and no freedom to pursue happiness. Marriage Equality is a matter of Civil Rights.

Civil rights denied to any minority can become rights denied to a majority. Even now, the LGBT minority in Nigeria are likely finding themselves outside the law. Draconian legislation may already have been passed which will make the gathering of ANY persons even to discuss LGBT issues punishable by imprisonment. Persons who are born with a homosexual orientation may not even be baptized by clergy. Defiant clergy will likewise be imprisoned. Third world leaders are already lobbying for similar discrimination in America. Are our own civil rights so secured that we risk apathy? Marriage Equality is a matter of protecting and preserving Civil Rights for all.

Further, I support HB 7395 as an ordained priest of the Episcopal Church. We are under incredible pressure by Nigerian religious leaders, and others like-minded, to deny equality to those Episcopalians who are homosexual. Just this week Bishops of the American Church have written eloquently and passionately resisting the ultimata of ultra-conservative voices. Marriage Equality is a matter of spiritual, moral and ethical witness.

I support HB 7395 as a gay man in a faithful and loving relationship with my partner of more than twenty years. Many of those years, in order to retain my ministry and livelihood were lived secreted and deeply discrete. In living two such separate lives, the costs to one’s creativity and emotional energy, one’s psyche and spirit, one’s self-esteem and sense of dignity are indefensible. The leadership of the parish I serve, with its commitment to justice and its discerned call to prophetic ministry encouraged, enabled, and supported the coming out process. The positive results of that journey together have been incalculable. Marriage Equality is a matter of living honestly and being afforded basic human dignity.

There is deep richness of research today which attests to the benefits of marriage equality for all. The fear that traditional heterosexual marriage will be harmed is proven unfounded and untrue. Research suggests that marriage equality demonstrates and models healthy gender equality in roles and responsibilities, and suggests marriage is transforming from a utilitarian and financial arrangement to a life-long journey in which partners develop and share mutual love, affection, respect and support. Same gender marriages model equality and healthy, egalitarian relationships. They are micro-societies of diversity living harmoniously. And, same gender marriages with children model an ethic of adoption, which speaks of the interdependence of human society. Marriage Equality is about our call to care for one another.

Together let us stand firm against fear, resist bigotry, shine the light of truth on the darkness of prejudice, and seek wisdom and the courage to insure the rights and dignity due every human being. Connecticut may yet be a beacon to others.

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