



Testimony before the Joint Committee on Judiciary re: Raised Bill 7395: An Act Concerning Marriage Equality and Raised Bill No. 1449: An Act Concerning the Recognition of Legal Unions From Other States and Jurisdictions

By Roger C. Vann, ACLU of Connecticut
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Thank you Senator MacDonald, Representative Lawlor and members of the Committee on Judiciary. My name is Roger Vann, Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut, and I am here to express our support for Raised Bill No. 7395 and Raised Bill No. 1449.

The ACLU of Connecticut supports Raised Bill No. 7395: An Act Concerning Marriage Equality

The legislature should not wait to remedy the exclusion of lesbian and gay couples from the institution of civil marriage. Marriage is about commitment. It is about sharing, love, trust and compromise. Two adults who make this private, personal choice, should not be denied the right to marry just because they are gay or lesbian.

Marriage is a unique legal status conferred and recognized by governments the world over. It brings with it a host of reciprocal obligations, rights, and protections. Yet it is more than the sum of its legal parts. It is also a cultural institution. The word itself is a fundamental protection, conveying clearly that life partners love each other, are united and belong by each other's side. It represents the ultimate expression of love and commitment between two people and everyone understands that. No other word has that power, and no other word can provide that protection.

Civil unions are not the same as marriage because they create a separate institution specifically for lesbian and gay couples. We know historically that separate is never equal. States cannot remedy the discriminatory exclusion of a minority group from a governmental institution by creating a separate institution exclusively for that group. To grant an historically excluded minority group partial access, through separate institutions or special designations that distinguish that group, is to persist in the message that the group can and should be classified and treated differently. For example, African-Americans were for many decades denied educational opportunities of any kind. When states began to mandate

that public education for African-American students be of quality equal to that provided to white students, some communities attempted to fulfill this mandate through better funded by still segregated schools. This practice was finally rejected in 1954 by the U.S. Supreme Court, which recognized that separation itself “generates a feeling of inferiority as to ... status in the community that may affect ... hearts and minds.” *Brown v. Board of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483, 494 (1954)

When a lesbian or gay couple is denied the opportunity to participate in a fundamental institution - such as marriage – which carries enormous societal prestige, that couple is disadvantaged. Exclusion from this prestigious institution is not innocuous or inconsequential. Such exclusion denies those families participation in an institution that our culture understands and respects as synonymous with family. It denies them access to something our culture understands as both a fundamental right and a civil right. Rather than completely embracing that lesbian and gay couples are part of a community of equals, it marks those families as different from all others.

The ACLU of Connecticut supports Raised Bill No. 1449: An Act Concerning the Recognition of Legal Unions From Other States And Jurisdictions

While we urge the passage of a marriage equality bill in Connecticut, we also support this step towards equality, which would respect the decisions of sister states to promote full equality and dignity for lesbians and gay men. This step is particularly important in light of recent developments in Connecticut’s neighboring state of Massachusetts, where state sanctioned same sex marriages are being legally performed.

The ACLU of Connecticut strongly urges this committee and the entire General Assembly to make yet another bold statement in favor of civil rights for gays and lesbians by passing Raised Bills 7395 and 1449.