

5925

Testimony in support of HB 5925: An Act Concerning Civil Union
March 17, 2008



Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. We are proud to live in the first state to legally recognize same sex relationships without a court mandate. But since we were "civil unionized", we have encountered many logistical, bureaucratic, and psychological barriers. Civil union has proved to be an unacceptable substitute for marriage.

We are amazed that every question about our civil union takes sentences and paragraphs of words to educate and explain. Also, it takes days- sometimes weeks- of calls and emails to find a reliable answer to simple, procedural questions. This is true relating to insurance, taxes, name change procedures, and filling out all types of forms.

When we were pre-registering Tracy at the hospital before she gave birth to our son, Jake, we were flummoxed when we were only offered 4 answers to the question of marital status: single, married, divorced, or widowed. After a discussion about our civil union, the hospital staff member agreed with us that we were "more married than single," but since she did not have civil union as an option, she had to put "single."

When attempts to contact administrators in the following weeks we were unsuccessful, we went to the hospital for Jake's birth wondering if we should have just said "married" or if that would have been illegal. Our primary concern was safety: As nurses we know that marital designation in the medical record is pertinent in determining who providers communicate with, who has legal access to information, and who signs consent. Even if civil union were an option on the form, would someone know what that meant in the frenzy of an emergency?

Another example involves our son's birth certificate. Tracy and I are both named as parents on the document, but ensuring that end result was complicated. We worked with a Department of Public Health employee who explained the paperwork we would have to file. She contacted the hospital to ensure they were expecting us and would be aware of the special procedures involved. We are not sure what would have happened if we hadn't educated ourselves and elicited help several months in advance. Even though Jake's birth certificate definitively names me as his parent, we have still been advised by lawyers that I should go through a potentially expensive adoption. It seems that if we were to leave the state, civil unions do not provide enough security for our family. Married couples do not have to incur these legal and financial burdens to protect their children.

We have found that the confusion surrounding civil union has made our life harder. Where marriage is a social construct that everyone understands, civil union is politically constructed arrangement that even we have trouble explaining.

Prior to our civil union on October 1, 2005, Katy and I did not hesitate to call ourselves married. We did not have another word to describe our relationship other than marriage. In September 2004 we had what could only be described as a wedding. In formalwear, we stood up in front of 200 guests to publicly commit to each other. Our parents walked us down the aisle. We recited vows. After that church ritual, she became my wife. The term wife and language of marriage do not belong solely to the government. They belong to communities and families. We did not use the term marriage to be political in any way. It is simply the most direct way to communicate the state of our couple hood and our long-term intentions.

In creating civil union the legislature was well-meaning and fair-minded in attempting to offer the same legal protections granted to married couples. But civil union has marked our family as "separate" and has locked us out of the protections offered by language. Having legal standing that does not identify us as gay or make us separate from our neighbors is imperative to keeping our family safe.

Thank you.

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