

Testimony in Support of "An Act Concerning Civil Unions"

Hello. My name is Catherine Osten. I was asked by my sister-in-law, Lynn Ferrari, to deliver her testimony to you today. She, very much, wanted to be here herself, but was unavoidably tied up at work. However, she, as I, believe it is important that you hear about the injustice and unconscionable treatment she received during the darkest hours after the death of her beloved partner (and my sister) Linda Osten.

Are Civil Unions the same as Marriage?

Short answer, absolutely NOT. Civil Unions create a secondary class of citizens and an administrative nightmare on many levels. Here's my story:

I lost the love of my life, Linda Osten, 5 days before Christmas last year and 9 days before her 50th birthday. Linda and I were together for almost 10 years and shared the most loving and true partnership, in every sense of the word. Linda was a most unique individual – she was caring, smart, organized, funny and absolutely the most committed and capable person I've had the good fortune to run across. The first time I met her, I knew she was special and would change the world – and she did! Linda devoted her 10 years in Hartford to making the Region, her City, and our neighborhood a better place to live and work.

Linda and I lived "picturebook perfect" lives for our first 8 years; wonderful friends, close and supportive families, a beautiful home on the best street in Hartford. Our lives were full and rich with interests and involvement in preservation, community development, social justice, and foundation and commission work. But, then in April of 2005, Linda was diagnosed with a rare and aggressive cancer. Just prior to her second surgery, Civil Unions became an option for the two of us. Neither of us wanted to be "civilized or unionized". We wanted nothing short of marriage. Given Linda's condition though, we thought it was wise to get as much protection under the law as possible – so we had a quiet, impromptu Civil Union ceremony under the Stegosaurus at City Hall, on October 4, 2005.

Linda worked through her illness and increasing pain for two and a half years with strength and courage and a drive rarely seen in healthy people. However, in May of 2007 the cancer began spreading to vital organs and Linda's fight was lost. She died on December 20th, 2007, and what followed represents many of the problems with creating this secondary class of citizens. In the final days of Linda's life, her sister Cathy offered to help make arrangements for cremation and a celebration of Linda's life.

The day after Linda's death, several members of her family and I went to the funeral home to make the final arrangements. I was introduced to the funeral director as Linda's spouse, but it became clear that he wished to address all questions to Linda's sister. At the point where he



needed additional information for the Death Certificate, he again asked Cathy which block he should check off where it asked for Linda's Marital Status:

Married, Separated Never married, Divorced or Widowed?

Cathy was adamant that **"NO, Linda was Civil Unioned, and that I was her legal spouse in Connecticut."** He responded that "civil union" was not an option on the Death Certificate and proceeded to check off the **Never married** block.

Papers to allow the body to be cremated and then delivered back to the funeral home also needed to be signed. Cathy suggested that I sign the papers, but the funeral director jumped in and insisted that they needed to be signed by a blood relative. We all knew this simply wasn't reasonable and didn't make sense. A married couple certainly would not have been told this, nor denied these simple rights.

I would love to tell you that I was very angry and this point, but the truth was I was too numb to be angry. Linda's entire family bristled, but just trying to cope with our grief seemed enough to deal with at the moment – so we left.

Fortunately, Cathy, the President of a union and the chief elected official of Sprague, was incensed enough and connected to the right people to follow up and get the situation corrected. People were contacted and the Commissioner of Health and Human Services was called – who in turn, called the Funeral Home and explained exactly how to fill out the Death Certificate and to tear up the cremation papers and rewrite them with my name.

This injustice and insensitivity would not have occurred if I could have simply responded **"MARRIED"**.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sincerely,

Lynn H. Ferrari
33 Charter Oak Place
Hartford, CT
March 17, 2008