

**TESTIMONY OF JAMES HANLEY IN SUPPORT OF SB 899
MARCH 6, 2009**

I am here to support SB 899 to implement the guarantees of equal protections for same sex couples.

I also want to thank the many people who have worked so hard to bring legal fairness to same sex couples in Connecticut.

Thanks to the citizens of Connecticut who have supported fairness, to community organizations like Love Makes a Family and to the tireless champions of constitutional equality in our state government. Their dedication has already changed our lives.

I have known I am gay since my earliest childhood memories, an awareness that I have always celebrated. But that identity as a gay human being meant I have had to fight hard all my life to be treated fairly. Sometimes I thought I would not live to see the coming of real equality for same sex partners in Connecticut, but I always hoped that in the end people would come to recognize that every citizen benefits from equality before the law.

We are weakened as a society when there are protected classes who are treated better than others. This is a step forward that will bring new strength to Connecticut.

My husband and I got married on November 12, the first day it was possible to walk into our town hall in Mansfield and be treated as equal members of the community who could show their commitment to each other in exactly the same legal way as could any other couple in Connecticut, straight or gay. It hard to describe the exquisite combination of simple and profound this experience was to us; the folks in the town offices were wonderful and welcoming. Two good friends happened to be there on other business and immediately joined us in celebrating our marriage on the spot.

This simple matter of filing a civil contract of marriage came after decades of demonstrations and political activism with some of the most dedicated people we have ever known. People who never gave up the struggle to be treated fairly and equally in the community.

There is still a long way to go. I am immensely proud that Connecticut is among the first of the states to aim to truly eliminate unfair discrimination against same sex couples and all the language that goes with it. Our partners and children need the same protections that everyone else takes for granted every day.

Our family just had a sharp reminder of the very real nature of what these changes mean. Just in the few months since my husband and I were married, I needed emergency medical services, an experience that showed us the crucial importance of the state legal protections we have finally achieved. At every step of the way, our responsibility for each other was assumed; the hospital treated our relationship and need to care for each other with absolute respect. At a trying time, it was reassuring to know at last we would not have any doubt that our state constitutional rights had already become part of everyday life in Connecticut.

Now the fight must turn to the unfair, unequal and discriminatory laws at the federal level. The list is more than a thousand long, from the insulting absurdity of the Defense of Marriage Act to Don't Ask, Don't Tell, to the fact that same sex couples routinely have to pay more Federal tax than heterosexual couples. I believe that eventually, as in Connecticut, the issue will simply come to equal treatment before the law, a concept even some members the current Supreme Court will not be able to avoid much longer.

Connecticut is a beacon of progress, equality and responsibility to our nation. Now we need to take the final step to eliminate all discriminatory language from our state statutes,

Thank You