

The Rev. Joshua Mason Pawelek
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Testimony on SB 899, March 6, 2009

Distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee:

First I want to thank you for the opportunity to come before you today to speak in support of SB 899, **“An Act Implementing the Guarantee of Equal Protections Under the Constitution of the State for Same-Sex Couples.”** My name is Josh Pawelek. I am the parish minister of the Unitarian Universalist Society: East and the Chairman these past three years of Connecticut Clergy for Marriage Equality, a collective of more than 300 clergy across the state who have worked to support gay and lesbian couples in their quest for marriage equality.

If you hear me say nothing else, I want you to hear that the Supreme Court’s decision in the Kerrigan case has been tremendously important in the lives of the gay and lesbian couples—both those to whom I minister and those who are my close personal friends. It is difficult to put into words the sense of joy these couples feel in coming to me—even if they already have a civil union—and asking me to marry them. There is a profound difference between civil union and civil marriage—separate is not equal—and it is wonderful to finally be able to say the words, “I pronounce you married.”

I also want you to hear that couples from all over the country are contacting me and my colleagues in CCME to ask about coming to our state to have their weddings. While I’m not in this business to make money, I recognize the economic benefit to the state can be enormous as couples from near and far come to CT to hear the words, “I pronounce you married.”

I urge you to support SB 899 for a variety of reasons. First, it brings clarity to our marriage statutes by bringing them in line with the Kerrigan decision, and merging civil unions into marriages. Obviously, such clarity will bring efficiency. Efficient government is effective government.

Second, SB 899 removes demeaning language that continues to suggest that marriages between same gender loving couples are somehow not as valid as marriages between heterosexual couples. I see this older, demeaning language as the sign of a time we have left behind in Connecticut. A state with a culture of acceptance and equality such as Connecticut does not need such demeaning and insulting language in its marriage statutes.

Finally, SB 899 will allow recognition of similar marriages and civil unions performed in other states as well as urge all states to recognize all Connecticut marriages. I believe this is simply the right thing to do to promote efficiency, to prevent long and drawn out court battles, and to send a message to the rest of the country that Connecticut

is a leader in honoring the worth and dignity of all its citizens and the citizens of other states.

Thank you.