



## Speak From Your Heart With Family & Friends

### Bring It Home!

A Message from the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force** and:

Action Wisconsin, Basic Rights Oregon, Empire State Pride Agenda, Equality California, Equality Florida, Equality North Carolina, Family Pride Coalition, Federation of Statewide LGBT Advocacy Organizations, Free State Justice, Freedom to Marry, Freedom to Marry Coalition of Massachusetts, Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders (GLAD), Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), Kentucky Fairness Alliance Lambda Legal, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center-NYC, Lesbian/Gay Rights Lobby of Texas, L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center, Love Makes a Family, Mano a Mano, National Association of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Centers, National Center for Lesbian Rights, National Stonewall Democrats, New York Association for Gender Rights Advocacy, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays(PFLAG), PROMO, Triangle Foundation, and The Wedding Party

On November 18, 2003, the highest court in Massachusetts declared that denying same sex couples the right to marry violates the state's constitution. The court gave the legislature 180 days to change state law to end this discrimination. This means that in a few months, history will be made: same sex couples will be able to be married in the eyes of the law in Massachusetts.

In response to the court's fair-minded decision, anti-gay organizations across the nation have gone into overdrive, mobilizing thousands of their supporters to contact members of Congress and state legislators. They are bombarding legislators with demands that they move anti-marriage legislation early in 2004.

It is important to understand the gravity of this situation and that the attacks are not only about "gay marriage." Our opponents seek to permanently enshrine our second class citizenship in the U.S. Constitution and state constitutions across the country. They want not only to preclude the recognition of marriage for same sex couples, but to restrict or eliminate other forms of partner recognition such as civil unions and domestic partnerships. They plan to poison the national debate with lies and distortions about our lives and relationships as a divisive wedge issue in the 2004 elections.

Simply put, this is a watershed moment in our civil rights movement; we cannot prevail without help.

Many of us are fortunate to have loving families and straight friends. Because we so rarely talk about it, most of our relatives and friends have no idea how few rights LGBT people have or that the religious and political right are launching this vicious and



dehumanizing campaign against us. Moreover, most of us have never asked our family and friends to take a stand for us or do anything to help us win equal rights.

Now is that time. We encourage you to summon up the courage to reach out to your family and friends and ask for their help. Let each one of them know what's going on and the way in which our lives are being distorted for political gain. Let them know that this is not some abstract political debate. Let them know that it's personal, that it affects you, your future, your civil rights, and the lives of people close to you. Ask each one of them to stand beside you and to speak out for you when the attacks and jokes come, as they inevitably will.

And finally, ask each one of them to contact their state legislators and their representatives in Washington to oppose all efforts to ban marriage for same sex couples, including the so-called "Federal Marriage Amendment." The most effective thing to do would be to have your family members and friends request meetings with their elected officials in their home districts. (Phone numbers for home district offices can be found in the blue pages of your phone book. Contact information for your representatives in Congress may be obtained by calling the Congressional switchboard at 202-224-3121 or by logging on to the House Web site and the Senate Web site.

If you aren't able to see family and friends in person, give them a call or send them a letter or email. A sample script for calls and a sample letter also appear at the end of this document.

You can do it. We know this will be difficult for many of us, so some helpful tips follow.

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## **TIP SHEET FOR TALKING TO YOUR FAMILY & FRIENDS:**

### **GENERAL TIPS:**

1. Don't wing it! Practice what you'd like to say to your loved ones with a trusted friend.
2. Enlist a "buddy" who also plans to talk turkey with his/her family and friends. Call each other for moral support. Check in on the results.
3. Do your homework. Make it easy for your loved ones to support you. Have the letter you'd like them to send to their elected officials already written and printed out. Include their name and address at the top of your letter. Leave a space for their signature. Have the envelopes filled out. Tell 'em you'll mail it for them too!
4. Remember, too much info is hard to digest. Think about the ONE thing you want your loved ones to know or remember. Tell a story - either about you or people you know that illustrates or how your or your friends' lives would have been easier if there wasn't discrimination in marriage rights.



5. Make sure your loved ones are registered to vote. This is crucial.

### **BREAKING THE ICE: Opening the Conversation**

Sample lines:

- Are you aware of the court decision in Massachusetts about marriage for same sex couples? You know this really affects me directly.

- I need to talk with you about something that's difficult for me but is really important to me.

- You've always been supportive of me. Are you aware of the marriage debate that's going on?

- Did you know that in this country I don't have the same rights as you? (If you're speaking to married folks, use an example of what benefits they have (social security, family health insurance hospital visitation etc&) and say flat out, "I don't have those rights."

- (If you're in a relationship): Do you know that if I were to die in an accident, \_\_\_\_\_ (my partner) would not get any of my social security benefits, and I've been paying into that system for years. Did you know that if \_\_\_\_\_ (my partner) was in a car accident and had to be taken to the hospital, I would be denied the right to see (him/her) in most hospitals in this country? You know that house we've been wanting to buy? Well, if either one of us dies, the one who's still around will have to pay estate taxes to keep the house? No married couple has to do that.

- (If you're not in a relationship): Did you know that if I were to meet someone and fall in love, the way things stand now, no matter how long we lived together, I'd never have the same rights and benefits that a straight person gets the minute they get married.

- Think of a situation in your family they can relate to involving a married couple and then say how you'd be treated in the same situation:

Aunt Clara is so lucky she has Uncle Joe's Social Security (pension) benefits to live on. It's not right that gay couples never get survivor benefits from Social Security.

When \_\_\_ broke her leg last year, she was lucky to have health insurance through her husband's employer - they'd still be in debt without it. I can't get health insurance for \_\_\_ from my company.

Mom, you worked to put dad through graduate school. You know, if I did the same thing for my partner, he'd have to pay taxes on what I gave to support him?

-Did you know that the religious and political right - people like Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Gary Bauer and mostly Republicans in Congress - are launching a nationwide effort to amend the U.S. Constitution to forever prohibit the recognition of same sex



marriages and permanently write my second-class citizenship into the constitution? This country has a lot more important things to deal with - the war in Iraq, the economy, health care. We have to stop them.

- This whole anti-marriage hysteria is about distracting the country from real issues, about dividing America, about hurting LGBT people for political gain. It's embarrassing - our country used to be a leader in civil rights.

### **STEER THE CONVERSATION:** Possible Topics and Questions

- "If gay people can get married it will ruin families." What does the ability of lesbian and gay people to get married take away from others? It helps our families but it hurts no one.

- "I don't have a problem with you having rights, but I don't like the word 'married.'" The concept of what marriage is has changed over the centuries. Women used to lose their citizenship when they married. Interracial marriage was outlawed in some states just fifty years ago. People could not marry outside their faith. Besides, we're talking about equal rights here. All other citizens have the right to marry. I should too.

- "What's wrong with civil unions - why do you have to say 'marriage?'" There's nothing "wrong" with civil unions - they're a big advance over where we are right now. BUT, civil unions don't give equal rights - they are a separate and very unequal status. For example, civil unions are not recognized in other states and because the federal government does not recognize them, couples in civil unions don't get any of the over 1,000 rights and responsibilities that come with marriage under federal law.

- "Not everyone wants gay people getting married in their church." I'm talking about marriage - in a courthouse with a justice of the peace -- not religion. Churches will still be free to marry whoever they choose in a religious ceremony. Not all gay people want to get married, maybe I never will but this country has to treat me as a full and equal citizen. It does when it collects my taxes.

- "If gays get married, what's to stop this from snowballing, opening the door to who knows what?" You know, they said the exact same thing when people sought to end the ban on interracial marriage - that it would lead to bestiality, incest, and polygamy. They also said these things about efforts to pass Domestic Partnership recognition policies and they still do, but of course that didn't happen and such arguments are insulting. We're talking about two consenting adults, two human beings being able to make a commitment to one another and be protected by the same rights you enjoy.

### **EXIT STRATEGY:** Remember, You're Looking for Help - Not Strife, So:

-If they're ready to help: Great! Here's the letter. Sign it. I'll mail it for you.

-If they're enthusiastic: Since you're up for doing this maybe you could spread the word. Talk with your friends about it. Get other voters to help us. I'll give you letters for others to sign.



-If they seem ambivalent or unsure: "Will you at least think about this? It's important to me. I want to call you in a week or so to talk a little more about it."

-If they say no: I understand that you're not with me on this yet and that hurts a lot. But try to give it more thought. I'm going to send you some stuff to read about this and maybe you'll reconsider.

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**SAMPLE LETTER, E-MAIL OR SCRIPT:**

Dear Family Member or Close Friend,

I appreciate and value the love you have shown me over the years. I've rarely talked about the kind of discrimination that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people face in this country, and I've never asked for you to stand up for me in ending this discrimination. Now, I need your help.

Using the so-called "threat" of gay marriage, the religious and political right are launching an unprecedented campaign to keep deny equal marriage rights for same-sex couples and they're even attacking other, more limited forms of family recognition, including civil unions and domestic partnerships. Their vicious campaign is based on lies and distortions about LGBT people, and that includes me. Please stand with me and for me by doing two things over the next few days:

1. Call or write your Member of Congress and your two U.S. Senators. Ask them to oppose the Federal Marriage Amendment (H.J. Res. 56), which would ban same-sex marriage and prevent courts from mandating even the most basic benefits, such as domestic partner health benefits and hospital visitation rights. The Congressional switchboard is 202-224-3121. If you aren't sure who your Congressperson and two Senators are, please call the Congressional switchboard or go to the House Web site and the Senate Web site.
2. Call your state representative/assembly member and state senator. Ask them to support equal treatment of same-sex couples and to oppose efforts to ban same-sex partner recognition in your state. If there is a specific anti-gay bill or proposed constitutional amendment pending, please mention that bill or amendment. You may be able to get this information by contacting your local or state LGBT rights organization. A list of these is posted at the Federation of Statewide LGBT Advocacy Organizations Web site. [<http://www.federationlgbt.org>]

Thank you for being there for me when I need your help.