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EQUALITY ILLINOIS REPORT: CIVIL UNIONS ONE YEAR LATER
NEARLY 5,000 COUPLES RECEIVE LICENSES; SEPARATE STATUS
STILL NOT EQUAL

CHICAGO--An Equality Illinois study being released today reports that nearly 5,000 couples obtained civil union licenses in Illinois over the last year yet still endured clear and consistent patterns of unequal treatment, were denied rights and protections and faced stigmatization despite the intent of the law that civil unions be equal to marriages.

Friday marks one year since the first civil union law took effect in Illinois, and Equality Illinois celebrates with the 4,910 couples who received licenses so they could publicly vow their love, commitment and dedication to family over the last 12 months.

Yet, the year has also provided ample evidence that the separate status of civil unions for same-sex couples is not equal to marriages.

The study by Equality Illinois, the state's oldest and largest LGBT advocacy organization, found, importantly, the very fact that same-sex couples in loving, committed relationships were not allowed to marry invited discrimination by stigmatization by public and private agents.

"As we feared, civil unions have not turned out to be equal to civil marriages," said Bernard Cherkasov, CEO of Equality Illinois. "In area after area, whether tax law, health insurance, hospitalization, family issues, personal finance and actions by state and local officials, couples were either treated unequally or denied their rights, or singled out for discrimination. As we learned in history, separate does not make equal."

Randy Hannig, Director of Public Policy for Equality Illinois, said the findings of the Equality Illinois assessment should provide ammunition for the ongoing push for marriage equality in the Illinois General Assembly and the courts.

"We will be sharing our findings with legislators to demonstrate the breadth of the problems with civil unions, and we call on the House and Senate to enact civil marriage," Hannig said.

An Equality Illinois survey of all 102 Illinois counties found that there were at least 4,910 civil union licenses issued statewide since the first licenses were issued June 1, 2011. There were 2,508 in Cook County, 845 in the five collar counties and 1,557 Downstate. There were licenses issued in all but eight of the state's 102 counties, or 92 percent of the counties.



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With more than 32,000 same-sex couples in Illinois, according to the 2010 census, that means that more than 15 percent of them sought the recognition and security promised by civil unions in just the first year. (In addition, thousands of same-sex couples who were married or joined in civil unions in other jurisdictions are considered to be covered by civil unions in Illinois.)

“Even though civil unions are not equal to marriages, the fact that so many couples wanted to make their relationships official in 92 percent of Illinois counties, from urban areas to rural areas, demonstrates the deep desire for sharing fully in the same kind of recognition afforded to only opposite-sex couples in Illinois,” Cherkasov said. “Now, we will use the information gathered in our civil union assessment to help all couples enjoy the rights and responsibilities of civil marriage.”

When civil unions became law, Equality Illinois and Lambda Legal launched the Civil Union Tracker to survey the experiences of hundreds of the couples who took the legal step. Combining those findings with scores of personal stories shared with Equality Illinois resulted in the report "One Year Later, Separate Has Not Proven To Be Equal."

The full report is available at
<http://eqil.org/cmsdocuments/2012CivilUnionsReport.pdf> .

Among the findings:

- There was rampant confusion over state income tax filing
- There were numerous problems with putting a civil union partner on company health plans
- Name changes allowed under state civil unions were difficult to apply to federal documents including passports
- Adoption, foster parent and birth certificate conventions for opposite-sex couples were challenged when used by same-sex couples in civil unions
- Hospitals restricted patient access to a same-sex spouse
- Partners could not pick up prescriptions for a spouse
- Buying and financing a home together was questioned and required burdensome and expensive additional expense
- Unlike heterosexual marriages, same-sex marriages and civil unions in other jurisdictions were not fully recognized as civil unions in Illinois
- Many people encountered instances when public officials and business people, and even family and friends, simply did not understand what civil unions are

“We cannot stand by and watch loving couples in civil unions—who thought they would be enjoying the same experiences as opposite-sex couples in

marriages—endure these difficult and often embarrassing challenges,” Cherkasov said. “The clearest and only solution is marriage equality.”

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