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African American Leaders Press for Passage of Marriage Equality in Illinois

“Discrimination is Wrong No Matter Whom the Target Is” African American Civic, Faith and Business Leaders Say

CHICAGO – January 2, 2013 – As a crucial vote in Springfield nears, twelve prominent African American leaders came together to announce their support for the passage of marriage equality legislation in Illinois. The leaders affirmed their support in an open letter urging lawmakers to give Illinois gay and lesbian couples the freedom to marry, declaring the bill’s passage would lead the state and country in the right direction. Notable supporters who signed the letter include Chicago Urban League CEO Andrea Zopp, former Illinois Senate President Emil Jones, and Rev. Dr. Richard Tolliver.

“We know gay and lesbian couples believe in family and commitment,” the leaders stated in a joint letter. “And we know that all families benefit from the protections and security marriage brings.”

The backing from African American leaders comes at a time of increased support for marriage equality in the United States. In Illinois, a December 2012 poll commissioned by Public Policy Polling shows that 60% of African Americans surveyed supported same-sex marriage. The open letter touches on how marriage has evolved throughout history to reflect the progress of society.

“We remember that not long ago, some states defined marriage as limited to people of the same race,” the letter states. “Today in Illinois, the rights of gay and lesbian couples to be treated as equal citizens are being violated. Treating any group of people as second-class citizens hurts us all, because discrimination is wrong no matter whom the target is.”

Overall in Illinois, a Paul Simon Public Policy Institute poll found the number of people who support same-sex marriage has increased ten points in two years, while the percentage of those opposing recognition of gay unions has declined by more than six points. A privately commissioned poll from May 2012 found that 54% of Illinoisans support civil marriage for gays and lesbians, compared to 40% opposed.

“Over time, equality and fairness will always win. We in Illinois have a chance to help lead the country in the right direction. The General Assembly should act now and give same-sex couples the freedom to marry. It is the right thing to do,” the open letter concludes.

The Religious Freedom and Marriage Fairness Act is sponsored by Representative Greg Harris (D-Chicago) and Senator Heather Steans (D-Chicago). Information about the bill is available at www.illinoisunites.org, along with information about how citizens can make their voices heard.

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*For additional information, or to interview one of the signers of the letter, contact
Equality Illinois at 773.477-7173*