



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Faith Leaders Praise Marriage Bill's Protections of Religious Freedom

In growing numbers, bishops, priests, pastors, and rabbis across Illinois unite behind legislation

CHICAGO (March 10, 2013) – With a vote fast approaching in the Illinois House of Representatives on a bill that would give same sex couples the freedom to marry, hundreds of faith leaders across Illinois are touting the bill's strong protections of religious freedom for faiths that do not recognize same-sex marriage. At the same time, the leaders say faiths that wish to extend marriage to all loving and committed couples would have the freedom to do so under the legislation.

The leaders noted that under the provisions of the Religious Freedom and Marriage Fairness Act (Senate Bill 10):

- No church or religious institution could ever be required to solemnize a marriage in conflict with its beliefs.
- No church could ever be required to open its sanctuary, parish hall or fellowship hall to a same-sex wedding.
- Churches and religious institutions exercising these rights would be held immune from any civil claim or legal or administrative liability for these actions.

Clergy, faiths and religious institutions around Illinois are urging the House to pass the Illinois Religious Freedom and Marriage Fairness Act, as the Illinois Senate did last month. Support for the bill among clergy is growing in Illinois. Now, more than 300 clergy from throughout Illinois have signed "An Open Letter from Illinois Clergy and Faith Leaders on Marriage," a 25 percent increase in signatories since the letter was released in December.

Other clergy have since released their own statements, including:

- A letter directed to African-American faithful circulated by **Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III**, senior pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ, Chicago, and **Rev. Dr. B. Herbert Martin** of the Progressive Community Church of Chicago and signed by 22 other clergy,
- A resolution by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America Metropolitan Chicago Synod,
- Supportive statements by the bishops of the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America - Metropolitan Chicago Synod and the Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church

The open letter from more than 300 Illinois clergy and faith leaders on marriage said, "there are differences among our many religious traditions. Some recognize and bless same-sex unions, and some do not. The important thing is that the Religious Freedom and Marriage Fairness Act protects religious freedom and guarantees that all faiths will decide which marriages should be consecrated

and solemnized within their tradition.”

In their letter, Rev. Dr. Moss and Rev. Dr. Martin also made the point: “We deeply respect the right of religious institutions to define marriage in accordance with their practices, beliefs, and doctrines, and this law in no way infringes upon that freedom. The religious exemption language in the Religious Freedom and Marriage Fairness Act is clear that members of the clergy or religious institutions are held legally harmless should they elect not to acknowledge any civil marriage that is not compatible with their religious beliefs.”

The signers of the open letter serve every corner of Illinois and include members of the following faiths: Baptist, Catholic, Conservative Judaism, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal, Lutheran, Mennonite, Metropolitan Community Church, Mormon, Presbyterian, Reconstructionist Judaism, Reform Judaism, Religious Science, Renewal Judaism, Unitarian Universalist, United Church of Christ, United Methodist, and Unity Church, as well as unaffiliated congregations.

One of the signatories, Rabbi Shoshana Conover of Temple Sholom in Chicago, was among a group of clergy who visited Springfield recently to talk to legislators. She told the press, “Some clergy will officiate at all weddings and some will not, yet we know that supporting full marriage equality through the Illinois legislature is our opportunity and sacred obligation to work with God to create a world of love and justice, compassion, peace, and pride.”

The following Illinois clergy members will be available for interview today, March 10, to discuss their support for SB 10.

Rev. Dr. L. Bernard Jakes, West Point Missionary Baptist Church, Chicago

Rev. David Weasley, American Baptist minister serving at Zion Lutheran Church, Tinley Park

Rev. Hardy Kim, Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago

Rev. Mark Winters, First Congregational Church, Naperville

Rev. Melody Eastman, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Wheaton

Rev. Julia Melgreen, Douglas Avenue United Methodist Church, Springfield

Illinois Unites for Marriage – a coalition led by Equality Illinois, Lambda Legal and the ACLU of Illinois – is continuing its statewide campaign in support of the bill, marshaling support and urging allies to step up contacts with their legislators as the House vote approaches. The coalition supporting the freedom to marry for all loving, committed couples – already strong with business, labor and community leaders, civic organizations, faith institutions and members of the clergy, professional athletes, Latino and African-American leaders, Republicans and Democrats – continues to grow.

Information about the legislation is available at www.illinoisunites.org, along with information about how citizens can make their voices heard.

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To talk to supportive members of the clergy and for additional information, please contact Mitchell Locin, Equality Illinois, 773-477-7173 or info@eqil.org