



Latino Leaders Support the Freedom to Marry in Illinois

*“Every gay and lesbian person is part of someone’s family,”
Latino Civic and Business Leaders Say*

CHICAGO – February 24, 2013 – As a crucial vote in the Illinois House of Representatives approaches, 23 prominent Latino leaders today announced their support for extending the freedom to marry to gay and lesbian couples in Illinois. The leaders affirmed their support in an open letter urging lawmakers to approve the Religious Freedom and Marriage Fairness Act, proclaiming, “no member of anyone’s family, whether they’re gay or straight, should face discrimination when they hope to marry the person they love.”

Notable supporters signing the letter include former City Clerk of Chicago **Miguel Del Valle**, Executive Director of the Latino Policy Forum **Sylvia Puente**, and **Jesse H. Ruiz**, Vice President of the Chicago Board of Education.

“As Latinos, we know our families are stronger when we stay together. We never turn our backs on family,” the leaders stated. “That includes supporting the freedom to marry for our gay and lesbian sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts and uncles.”

The backing from Latino leaders comes at a time of strong support for marriage equality in Illinois: a *Crain’s/Ipsos* poll released Tuesday shows Illinoisans supporting marriage equality, with 50 percent in favor and only 29 percent opposed. Of the 50 percent in support, 37 percent “strongly” support the freedom to marry, according to the poll.

The Illinois House’s Executive Committee is scheduled to take up the bill – Senate Bill 10 – this Tuesday.

“Relationships between Latino same-sex couples have existed for generations, built on trust, loyalty, and love,” today’s letter stated. “Marriage equality would grant legal recognition to these existing committed relationships. These couples want to marry for the same reason straight couples do – to make a lifetime commitment to the person they love, so that they can care for and protect one another through marriage.”

The support also comes at a time where every major newspaper serving Illinois has endorsed the marriage equality bill, including the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the *Daily Herald*, the *Peoria Journal Star*, the *Springfield Journal-Register*, and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. In its edition last Sunday, the *Daily Herald* editorialized, “the Illinois Senate has done its part to advance the notion of human rights in Illinois. Now it’s up to the state House.”

“Imagine if your spouse got sick, but you were not allowed to take time off of work because your employer did not treat you as married,” the letter states. “That is what gay and lesbian couples face in our state today. Without the freedom to marry, it is harder for them to take care of each other.”

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. 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, African-American leaders, Republicans and Democrats – continues to grow.

“The Illinois 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.

A copy of the open letter with the full list of signatories is attached below this release. 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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For additional information, contact Mitchell Locin, Equality Illinois Media Liaison, 773-477-7173; info@eqil.org



An Open Letter from Latino Leaders on Marriage Equality

Every gay and lesbian person is part of someone's family —is someone's son or daughter, sister or brother, cousin, aunt or uncle. No member of anyone's family, whether they're gay or straight, should face discrimination when they hope to marry the person they love.

As Latinos, we know our families are stronger when we stay together. We never turn our backs on family. That includes supporting the freedom to marry for our gay and lesbian sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts and uncles.

Relationships between Latino same-sex couples have existed for generations, built on trust, loyalty, and love. Marriage equality would grant legal recognition to these existing committed relationships. These couples want to marry for the same reason straight couples do – to make a lifetime commitment to the person they love, so that they can care for and protect one another through marriage.

Families come in different shapes and sizes. Some include a mother, a father and their children. Others have a mother, the children, and their grandmother. Still others are led by two women who share love and a commitment. All families deserve an equal chance to make it in the world, and all families deserve to be treated with respect by their government.

Legislation currently pending in Springfield would recognize the freedom to marry for gay and lesbian couples. It would give these couples the right to enter into civil marriage. At the same time, the law would protect the right of churches to decide whom they will marry. No church or religious organization would ever be required to perform a marriage contrary to its beliefs.

Imagine if your spouse got sick, but you were not allowed to take time off of work because your employer did not treat you as married. That is what gay and lesbian couples face in our state today. Without the freedom to marry, it is harder for them to take care of each other.

The Illinois General Assembly should act now and give same-sex couples the freedom to marry. It is the right thing to do.

Sincerely,

Martin Castro, Chairman, of the Illinois Human Rights Commission

Jorge Cestou, Human Rights Organization

Gery Chico, Attorney, Chico & Nunes

Miguel Del Valle, Former City Clerk of Chicago & Former State Senator

Juan Dies, Co-Founder, Sones de Mexico Ensemble

Guillermo Gomez, M.S., Vice President of Urban Affairs, Healthy Schools Campaign

Alicia Gonzalez, Executive Director, Chicago Run

Marco E. Jacome, Chief Executive Officer, Healthcare Alternative Systems

Virginia Martinez, Attorney at Law

Carlos Mock

Mona Noriega, Commissioner, Chicago Commission on Human Relations

Olivia Pantoja, Samco Enterprises

Maria Pesqueira, President and Chief Executive Officer, Mujeres Latinas en Accion

Sylvia Puente, Executive Director, Latino Policy Forum

Juan Rangel, Chief Executive Officer, United Neighborhood Organization

Alonzo Rivas, Regional Counsel, Mexican American Legal Defense and Education
Fund

Richard T. Rodriguez, Acting Chairperson of Latino Studies, University of Illinois

Celena Roldan

Jesse H. Ruiz, Vice President, Chicago Board of Education; Attorney, Drinker Biddle

Pat Pulido Sanchez, CEO, Pulido Sanchez Communications

Carlos Tortolero, President, National Museum of Mexican Art

Carmen Velasquez, Alivio Medical Center

Estelle Gonzales Walgreen, Co-Founder, Hispanically Speaking News