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## **Illinois Unites Urges Swift Passage of Legislation Extending Freedom to Marry**

*Marriage equality is the right thing for Illinois' citizens, families and businesses, coalition says*

CHICAGO – JANUARY 31, 2013 – With the opening of the 98<sup>th</sup> Illinois General Assembly this week, Illinois Unites for Marriage urged state legislators to move quickly in passing the Religious Freedom and Marriage Fairness Act. The Act would extend the freedom to marry to gay and lesbian couples.

“Acknowledging the freedom to marry for gay and lesbian couples is the right thing for Illinois,” said Bernard Cherkasov, CEO of Equality Illinois. “It will make our state stronger, better for its citizens and families, and more competitive economically.”

On January 21, 2013, for the first time in U.S. history, an American president referenced the freedom to marry in his inaugural address. President Obama – himself a former member of the Illinois General Assembly – stated, “If we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal, as well.”

Obama has called on the Illinois General Assembly to pass the Religious Freedom and Marriage Fairness Act, as has Senator Dick Durbin. In the new General Assembly, the bill has been filed as HB110 and SB10. Its sponsors are Representative Greg Harris (D-Chicago) and Senator Heather Steans (D-Chicago).

Since Illinois Unites was formed six weeks ago, voices from every corner and community of the state have come forward to express support for including gay and lesbian couples in the freedom to marry. More than 250 clergy members from a broad variety of denominations, business leaders including the CEO of Navistar International and the retired chairman of Exelon Corporation, labor leaders and public officials from diverse communities have joined the chorus. In addition, the editorial pages of newspapers across the state have called on lawmakers to pass the legislation, including:

- *Chicago Sun-Times* (12/16/12, 12/25/12)
- *Chicago Tribune* (1/3/13)
- *Peoria Journal-Star* (1/4/13)
- *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (1/4/13)
- *State Journal Register* (1/5/13)
- *Daily Herald* (1/15/13)

“The momentum is building. Polls show that a majority of Americans – and a majority of Illinoisans – believe same-sex couples should have the freedom to marry.” said Jim Bennett of Lambda Legal. “We’ve reached a tipping point.”

Nine states currently recognize marriage for gay and lesbian couples. 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. Another poll, from May 2012, found that 54% of Illinoisans support marriage for gays and lesbians, compared to 40% opposed.

“It’s the best thing for Illinois to treat all of its citizens with dignity and respect,” said Ed Yohnka of the ACLU of Illinois.

Illinois Unites for Marriage is led by Equality Illinois, Lambda Legal and the ACLU of Illinois.

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