



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Marriage Bill Campaign in Final Push *Rep. Harris: "I'm prepared to put it all on the line."*

CHICAGO (March 1, 2013) – Marriage bill supporters are sending tens of thousands of messages to Illinois House members in the aftermath of the successful committee vote moving the bill to the full House for action.

The flurry of activity is part of the ongoing campaign from the Illinois Unites for Marriage coalition formed by Equality Illinois, Lambda Legal and ACLU of Illinois to push for passage of the Religious Freedom and Marriage Fairness Act.

As part of the campaign, the House sponsor of the bill, Rep. Greg Harris, on Thursday sent an open letter to the bill's supporters throughout Illinois saying that the vote on Senate Bill 10 could happen any day now that it has passed out of the House Executive Committee.

Harris said that opponents are working feverishly to defeat the bill and that supporters of the freedom to marry need to counter that by calling and emailing their House members. "In the final days of this campaign, it's critical that we keep up the pressure until this bill passes. As the House sponsor of the bill, I'm prepared to put it all on the line until we pass SB10 in the House," Harris wrote in the letter.

"I'm sure I don't have to tell you that this bill is about a lot more than politics and legislation," Rep. Harris said. "It's personal -- for me and the countless gay and lesbian citizens of Illinois who are waiting for our state to extend the protections and respect all families deserve."

Harris's message is being backed by the efforts of the coalition. Just Wednesday, Equality Illinois delivered about 10,000 postcards to the offices of House members in Springfield representing every legislative district in the state. Volunteers had gathered the signatures at festivals, street corners, community meetings, and churches and synagogues.

Over 70 phone banks are reaching thousands of Illinoisans and urging them to contact their representative. Even as the Executive Committee was voting Tuesday night, phone banks were at work contacting Illinois voters, and those phone banks are continuing right up until Rep. Harris calls the bill for a vote on the House floor.

The ongoing effort has been dependent on the work of hundreds upon hundreds of volunteers, and coalition organizers say still more are needed. "The commitment and energy of our volunteers is amazing. We can only succeed if people step up to contact their House members and volunteer for this campaign," said Bernard Cherkasov, CEO of Equality Illinois, the state's oldest and largest LGBT advocacy organization.

The Illinois Unites for Marriage coalition is also continuing its one-on-one meetings with House members, making sure they are aware that the bill allowing all loving, committed couples to marry while protecting religious freedoms has the strong support of business, labor and community leaders, civic organizations, faith institutions and members of the clergy, African-American and Hispanic leaders, and Republicans and Democrats.

Fifty of Illinois' most prominent business leaders and corporations have called on the General Assembly to pass the bill, as have nearly 300 clergy and religious leaders from a wide variety of faith traditions. Last Sunday, nearly two-dozen prominent Latino leaders announced their support in an open letter urging lawmakers to approve the legislation, stating "no member of anyone's family, whether they're gay or straight, should face discrimination when they hope to marry the person they love."

In a statewide letter sent Friday to marriage supporters, the bill's Senate sponsor, Sen. Heather Steans, wrote, "Grassroots supporters have always been at the core our efforts to win marriage for all Illinois families. You're how we passed marriage in the Senate. And, if you help us keep up the pressure on the House, you're how Illinois will become the 10th state to extend marriage to all loving

couples."

Illinois voters can identify and reach their House member directly through the coalition website: www.illinoisunites.org/letswin.
Volunteers can sign up for phone banks at www.illinoisunites.org/events.

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Volunteers at over 70 phone banks are calling thousands of Illinois voters. The calls are urging voters to contact their House members and ask for a Yes vote on the freedom to marry bill.



About 10,000 postcards from marriage supporters are being delivered to House members in Springfield by Caroline Staerk, field director of Equality Illinois.

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