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University of Illinois Study Points to Need for Marriage Equality throughout Illinois

CHICAGO—As legislators are being asked to consider the freedom to marry, a new analysis from a University of Illinois expert on LGBT life in downstate Illinois is pointing to the importance of the issue in all parts of the state, from Chicago to Carbondale and everywhere in between.

The researcher, Ramona Faith Oswald, is a professor of human and community development at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Citing census data, Oswald said that more than 9,300 same-sex couples make their homes outside of Cook County, not counting many more lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender couples who are not living together.

“Downstate LGBT couples are mainly born and raised in Illinois,” Oswald said in the analysis. “Thus, same-sex marriage is an issue that affects families with connections and history in downstate Illinois.... Many downstate parents, siblings, and other relatives of LGBT persons would like for their loved ones to have the right to marry.”

Bernard Cherkasov, CEO of Equality Illinois, the state’s oldest and largest LGBT advocacy organization, said the analysis points to the need for the General Assembly to look at the freedom to marry as not a big-city issue but one that affects the entire state. Earlier this year Equality Illinois opened two new field offices in the Collar Counties and Springfield to expand outreach in critical areas in northern Illinois and central and southern Illinois.

“As lawmakers look at the Religious Freedom and Marriage Fairness Act, they should consider that LGBT people and their families live in every corner of their state and in every House and Senate district,” Cherkasov said. “We can provide these loving, committed couples the privileges, responsibilities and family protections of civil marriage and at the same time guarantee religions the right to decide themselves whether to consecrate the marriages.”

Cherkasov noted that on the one-year anniversary of civil unions on June 1, 2012, an Equality Illinois survey found that nearly 5,000 civil union licenses were issued in 94 of Illinois’ 102 counties.

“We also studied the results of the civil unions throughout Illinois and found numerous instances where civil unions did not prove equal to civil marriages,” he said. “In area after area, whether tax law, health insurance, hospitalization, family issues, personal finance and actions by state and local officials, couples were

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either treated unequally or denied their rights, or singled out for discrimination.”

In her University of Illinois study, Oswald also found that same-sex couples in downstate Illinois are more likely than those in Chicago to be raising children. “If you believe that legal marriage benefits children, it is logical to believe that same-sex marriage would benefit children raised by same-sex couples,” Oswald said.

Read the University of Illinois analysis at:

<http://illinois.edu/lb/article/72/69900/page=1/list=list?skinId=1643>

Read the Equality Illinois Report: Civil Unions One Year Later; Separate Status is Not Equal at: <http://www.eqil.org/cmsdocuments/2012CivilUnionsReport.pdf>

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