

A REPORT FROM EQUALITY ILLINOIS

ILLINOIS RELIGIOUS FREEDOM PROTECTION AND CIVIL UNION ACT ONE YEAR LATER, SEPARATE HAS NOT PROVEN TO BE EQUAL

June 1, 2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In passing the Illinois Religious Freedom Protection and Civil Union Act, which took effect on June 1, 2011, the lawmakers intended that a same-sex couple in a civil union would be treated identically to a heterosexual couple in a marriage under Illinois law.

Nearly 5,000 couples entered civil unions during the first year of the law. Relationships of thousands more, who had entered civil unions, domestic partnerships, or civil marriages in other jurisdictions, were recognized as civil unions in Illinois, under the Act.

During the course of the year, Equality Illinois tracked the experiences of couples in civil unions and found that in numerous and substantive ways couples in civil unions were treated unequally, denied rights or protections, or stigmatized. Importantly, the very fact that same-sex couples in loving, committed relationships were not allowed to marry invited discrimination by stigmatization by public and private agents.

THE LAW

On January 31, 2011, Governor Pat Quinn signed into law the Illinois Religious Freedom Protection and Civil Union Act. The law took effect on June 1, 2011.

The Act, passed with bipartisan support, aimed to allow same-sex and different-sex couples to enter civil unions and access all rights, protections, benefits and responsibilities previously available only to married heterosexual couples. According to a study published by Equality Illinois in 2006, [*Strangers in the Eyes of the Law*](#), there are 648 such rights, protections, benefits and responsibilities that were previously denied to gay and lesbian couples in loving, committed relationships.



SAME LOVE, DIFFERENT STATUS

Rather than allow same-sex couples to marry, Illinois lawmakers instead created a separate status. However, in passing the civil union law, lawmakers intended that in all areas governed by Illinois law, couples in a civil union would be treated identically to heterosexual couples in a marriage. Unlike heterosexual couples who can choose between a civil union or a civil marriage, same-sex couples are only allowed to enter civil unions. Indeed, even same-sex couples who are legally married in other jurisdictions, such as New York, Iowa, and Washington, are only recognized in Illinois as civil-unioned.

THE PROCESS

In the first month 1,618 couples received a civil union license under the new law, by the sixth month 3,729 couples received a license, and in only one year at least 4,910 couples received a civil union license. There were 2,508 licenses issued in Cook during the year, 845 licenses issued in the five collar counties around Cook, and 1,557 licenses issued Downstate. The interest in obtaining a civil union was statewide: Licenses were issued in 92 percent of the counties; only eight counties out of Illinois' 102 counties had no civil union applicants.

Thousands of additional same-sex couples across the state who have a marriage, a civil union, or a domestic partnership issued by another jurisdiction, are also recognized as "civil-unioned" in the state of Illinois.

Upon the signing of the Act, Equality Illinois and Lambda Legal launched the Illinois Civil Union Tracker to ensure that same-sex and different-sex couples who have a civil union are treated fairly under Illinois law.

Over the course of the year, Equality Illinois followed experiences of numerous couples. Towards the conclusion of the first year of the law, Equality Illinois surveyed couples through the Civil Union Tracker on their experiences and also talked to scores more who contacted Equality Illinois with their stories.

THE ASSESSMENT

The result of Equality Illinois' year-long assessment is summarized here for patterns and also presented in the participants' own words. It is the clearest evidence yet that civil unions are not equal to marriage. As we painfully learned through our national history, separate does not make equal.

Below, we highlight a number of critical areas in which couples in a civil union are treated unequally or are denied rights, protections, benefits, or recognition available under state law to married heterosexual couples. Importantly, the very fact that same-sex couples in loving, committed relationships were not allowed to marry invited discrimination by stigmatization by public and private agents.

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TAXATION

More than 8 out of 10 couples reported difficulty in filing joint state taxes this year. Even though the civil union law expressly provided for equal treatment of all couples, the Illinois Department of Revenue initially refused to allow same-sex couples in a civil union to file taxes jointly. The Department's late decision to comply with the civil union law created mass confusion for taxpayers, employers, and tax professionals.

Because same-sex couples in a civil union are not allowed to file their federal tax returns jointly (the IRS does allow heterosexual civil union couples to file jointly), same-sex civil union couples are required to create a separate federal "as if married filing jointly" return, just so they can file their Illinois tax return.

- "It was confusing having to make a fake federal joint form to base the real state joint form off of and then have to go back and redo the two separate individual federal forms."
- "It was difficult to file our federal taxes twice, since we each have several employers, own a business together, and file a Schedule C as self-employed people."
- "Illinois demands a 'false' federal return as if we were married. Iowa (where we were married) uses the 'real' federal return. And, of course, for the 'real' federal we are single."

Illinois does not permit e-filing for civil union couples.

- "Filing was not electronic this year."
- "Having to mail in the state form with the fake federal form instead of filing it electronically was an additional hassle."
- "It cost more because we could not e-file and felt the need to hire an accountant to verify that we were filing correctly."

It is more expensive and even more time-consuming to file taxes as a civil union couple because of the additional burdens associated with calculating non-taxable benefits, generating federal *adjusted gross income*, and other requirements.

- "The difference between us being forced to lie and file federal taxes as 'single' and if we could file as married was over \$4000! We (our kids, our family) lost out on \$4000 because we have to file federally as single."
- "We were charged more because we had to file three forms, (two separate federal and one joint state) which heterosexual couples do not have to do. Our taxes took three hours to complete at our preparer's office."
- "It cost us more because of the complexity of filing jointly in Illinois but separately at the federal level. For the first time ever, we hired a CPA to do our taxes since we were afraid of making a mistake."

- “We had to pay our accountant twice his normal fee because he had to create dummy federal tax returns in order to back out the numbers he needed for our individual federal tax returns.”

Financial advisors were ill-equipped to deal with the additional burdens for civil union couples.

- “H&R Block’s staff didn’t initially understand that marriage and civil unions are similar. We felt that the tax person was ignoring our claims to a civil union and filing joint state taxes.”
- “The people at H&R Block had NO idea how to handle civil union taxes, how much it would cost, or even how to deal with the difficulties between state and federal tax forms.”
- “Using TurboTax we were supposed to file federally twice and pay for it TWICE. It was confusing and I think we actually did it wrong.”
- “We had a problem with filing for the state tax returns as our tax rep did not know what a civil union is and we ended up filing as single at first.”

FAMILY MEDICAL ACCESS

Nearly 6 out of 10 respondents reported having problems obtaining health insurance for their civil union spouse. In addition, couples experienced unequal treatment even in times of crisis or urgent medical need. For example, some reported problems visiting their civil union spouse in the hospital, outside of visitors' hours (which is available for married heterosexual couples) or picking up or dropping off a prescription.

Health Insurance:

Many companies are self-insured or offer private insurance and, therefore, have chosen to provide health coverage to only federally recognized couples, leaving civil union couples to fend for themselves.

- “The employer of my civil union spouse still will not provide health insurance for me. I am currently covered by my current employer, but there is a good likelihood that I will be unemployed within the next year.”
- “My employer was owned by a religious organization so my partner had to switch jobs to get me health insurance.”
- “The company plan is organized under federal ERISA and federal DOMA trumps Illinois’ Civil Unions Act.”

Since civil unions are not federally recognized, the civil union partners of federal government employees are not eligible for insurance coverage.

- “My spouse is a retired Navy Vet and has wonderful insurance. Unfortunately, because of DOMA, our California marriage and Illinois civil union don’t count, so I have to purchase insurance on the open market.”
- “My partner is retired from the federal government and I am still working for the state government. I am concerned that if I lose my job, I will lose my insurance and I have a pre-existing condition (cancer survivor). Because our Illinois civil union is not recognized by the federal government, she would not be able to pick me up on her insurance if I lost my job.”
- “I work for the federal government and it does not recognize my marriage/civil union and therefore does not provide health insurance coverage. The tough bit is that I pay for the family coverage in order to cover our children, so even though there is no additional cost to the government, my wife cannot be on my plan.”

Some couples are forced to buy separate insurance plans at higher costs.

- “Domestic partner benefits are offered, but the benefit of the partner becomes taxable income to the primary insured per IRS rules.”
- “In the end, we would have had to pay approximately twice as much as heterosexual couples to have my partner enrolled in my insurance plan.”

Even when an employee is able to obtain coverage for her or his same-sex civil union spouse, the coverage is not always the same as for married heterosexual couples.

- “Our fertility process was not covered in the same way as my heterosexual colleagues and we have paid more through costs.”
- “When my partner tried to use the vision health care, he was denied using it at the doctor’s office because they don’t accept *partners*.”

Couples in a civil union are required to provide *additional* documents in order to obtain health insurance coverage for a partner.

- “We presented our civil union certificate, but unlike our married counterparts, we were required to sign a notarized affidavit confirming our relationship and provide proof of joint finances.”
- “We had to provide a pile of documents, including a will and bank account.”
- “We had to provide additional paperwork showing account information and have to pay \$200 extra each month for coverage.”

Human Resource departments and insurance agencies are ill-prepared to adequately support a separate status of employees, which made it difficult to add a partner within the 30-day limit.

- “The HR department had no idea how to handle adding me to her insurance. It took them so long to figure it out that we eventually had to be back charged, at a total of \$700, unexpectedly one pay period.”
- “Many clerks in human resources and their supervisors had not received any training and there was much confusion, incorrect information, and a long process.”
- “Medicaid had not heard of the Civil Union Law.”
- “My spouse had to bring in a copy of the Illinois law to prove that this was something her HR department could do.”
- “The online forms to set up health insurance would not allow my spouse to be added, saying that the spouse was the wrong gender.”

Hospitals:

In hospitals, couples experienced unequal treatment even in times of crisis or urgent medical need, such as when visiting a civil union spouse outside of visitors’ hours.

- “There was some initial confusion on the part of non-medical support staff.”
- “My hospital treated me like I was a stranger to my partner. They did not keep me in the loop.”

Pharmacies:

In pharmacies, individuals were either rejected or experienced delays when picking up or dropping off a prescription for a sick civil union spouse.

- “At first, our drug store acted all confused and slow.”

- “My partner is the beneficiary on my insurance plan, so my name appears on her card. Some pharmacy workers are confused and were pretty rude. It shouldn’t have been an issue, and I think if it were male/female names they would not have questioned the relationship.”
- “We had to explain the civil union partnership and last name differences.”

NAME CHANGES

Almost half of respondents reported having problems changing their last names in connection with their civil union. Even though some federal agencies have issued guidelines on the circumstances in which they would accept a civil union certificate in order to change a taxpayer's name, the information has been inadequately and inconsistently circulated. In addition, the fact that civil-unioned couples are "not married" has created additional burdens and obstacles for spouses in a civil union.

Because Illinois civil unions are not generally recognized by the federal government, there is much difficulty changing names on certain federal documents.

- "The US Passport office would not accept a civil union certificate as proof of a 'marriage' so they wouldn't issue us new passports."
- "The federal government would not change the name on my passport. They said I could not change it based on a name change from a civil union."
- "The social security office and DMV had a hard time accepting the civil union certificate. They stated that they had never heard of the civil union before."
- "My wife had problems with FAFSA and school applications due to differences between federal and state offices and lack of knowledge on the part of financial aid offices. Also, she had a problem changing her name on an ID at the DMV, as they didn't know which forms to use."
- "The Social Security Administration employee originally refused the certified copy from the county for the union."

Requirements are either different or unequally applied for those in a civil union.

- "Again, unlike our married counterparts, we are required to file for a change of name, pay the \$271 court fees, put an ad in the paper, and wait six weeks."
- "I had to be married under my maiden name, but have elected to keep my married name because it's also the name of my kids and their kids. This has actually been the biggest hassle of the whole civil union process and still is. I am not changing my name legally back to my maiden name – many women marrying men keep their original last name, so I don't understand the issue."

The option to change a name is not uniformly offered to couples entering a civil union, creating legal obstacles and additional costs for the spouses after the fact.

- "They did not ask if we wanted a name change."
- "I was never asked during the application process if I wanted to change my name. So now I need to go back to the clerk's office to petition a name change."

Crucial information is inadequately distributed to front-line state and local officials, who are responsible for keeping track of two separate statuses for Illinoisans.

- “I still haven’t been able to get a straight answer as to what the process is – my name isn’t changed because, since I want to hyphenate, no one can tell me if I need to petition the court or if it can simply be done by visiting the required offices. I have no idea how to get this done and I’ve called the County Clerk and related offices.”

BUILDING A FAMILY

Nearly half of the respondents who chose to adopt or foster a child recently experienced difficulty relating to their status as a couple in a civil union. Initially, some agencies believed that they could refuse to place children with couples in a civil union – an error that created panic and confusion for many prospective parents. Additional challenges came in proving family bonds, navigating the legal process, and finalizing post-adoption documentation. Aside from the bureaucratic burdens, couples and their children were forced to suffer the stigma of second-class family status.

Moreover, as the state addressed eight separate attempts to limit the ability of civil union couples to adopt and foster children in the foster system, child welfare agencies and prospective parents had to deal with the traumatic consequences of an unequal family status.

Adoption and Foster Care:

- “The first agencies we called upon (DCFS/Catholic Charities) would not allow us to foster through them.”
- “We were expected to do a civil union by the GAL (Guardian Ad Litem) to bolster our respectability as a couple. It somehow proved our commitment to one another.”
- “Although we are not currently in the foster process, Illinois will not allow my spouse’s name on the foster care license”
- “We had to go through second parent adoption even though we were listed as co-parents on the original birth certificate because of concerns that other states won’t recognize the civil union and the rights of parents in a civil union.”

Birth Certificates:

More than a third of respondents reported difficulty when applying for a birth certificate in both parents’ names.

- “The state of Kentucky was very slow in responding to our request for a name change on our daughter’s birth certificate after the adoption. After four months, the new certificate was mailed per our request.”
- “My partner and I are currently starting a family. I called our doctor through (our) hospital to ensure that we will not have problems getting my partner’s name on the birth certificate when the big day comes. The nurse who called me back told me that she had no idea and that I should contact the legal department. She did not give me their contact information. I have not yet contacted the legal department.”

- “The new birth certificate should now say partner, but still said mother and father.”
- “I am listed as my daughter’s ‘father’ on her birth certificate from 13 years ago...I was wondering if I can have that changed.”
- “When our son was born (in March 2012), we still had to go through the 2nd parent adoption process even though we could be named as co-parents on the original birth certificate. We were advised to go through the adoption because other states and the federal government may not recognize the civil union.”
- “We encountered some questions about our ‘marriage’ status when we were filling out the paperwork at the hospital for my son’s birth certificate in March 2012. The woman handling the paperwork wanted to see a copy of our marriage license before putting us down as co-parents. She backed down from this request when I asked her if she asked all families, including straight couples, for a copy of their marriage license.”

Child Care and Daycare Facilities:

Some respondents utilizing child care or daycare facilities reported having problems being recognized as parents when dropping off or picking up their children.

PENSIONS

More than a third of respondents reported having problems in naming their civil union partner as the beneficiary of their pension.

Since civil unions are not federally recognized, the civil union partners of employees of the federal government or self-insured companies following federal law cannot be named as the beneficiary of their partner's pension.

- “Because my partner is a federal retiree, our civil union is not recognized by the federal government and, therefore, I am not entitled to her pension in the event that she died. As a result, my standard of living would be greatly diminished if my partner died.”
- “Because of DOMA neither of us are allowed to be assigned as a pension beneficiary.”
- “I was told he was not entitled since my pension is a disability pension (police) and we were not married prior to my retiring on it.”
- “My cash balance will go to my spouse in a lump sum if I die before starting to receive benefits, but he isn't eligible to receive benefits if I die after I start receiving payments.”

BUYING A HOME

More than one out of every four couples who purchased a home had joint ownership or joint mortgage issues mishandled because of their status as a civil union couple.

Married heterosexual couples are able to own property in “joint tenancy by the entirety,” which means that when one person passes away, the survivor inherits the entire property. The title has other crucial, well-tested protections for each party in a couple. In numerous instances, civil union couples have been barred from owning the property jointly.

- “We just refinanced and had to submit paperwork three different times because the title company didn’t understand how we were supposed to sign documents because of our civil union.”

Applying for a mortgage jointly means that both partners’ incomes can count toward the sought mortgage. In a number of instances, civil union couples were forced to file mortgage and refinancing applications individually, or had to educate finance professionals at their own time and expense before being allowed to apply jointly.

- “Despite the civil union law, we are still not able to file for a mortgage jointly, and must continue to submit all this paperwork twice, and once we complete the home purchase process, we will still be considered two separate owners with no relationship to each other. Only MARRIED couples can file for a mortgage jointly or own property as one entity.”
- “We are in the process of refinancing our home and the application by the local bank does not recognize civil unions (because of DOMA) so had to file as joint/individual co-applicants”
- “We paid more than straight couples to ensure joint ownership issues”

Time and again, when asking for equal treatment, civil union couples trying to purchase a home were met with confusion.

- “We purchased a timeshare together in Las Vegas, NV, and they listed us as ‘Single’ with rights to survivorship. NV has a civil union law-we didn’t understand why they wouldn’t do it”

OBTAINING A CIVIL UNION LICENSE

More than one out of every five respondents reported having difficulty with the local County Clerk's office when obtaining a civil union license.

Front-line clerk staff are ill-equipped to deal with two-class system where some couples are able to enter either marriage or a civil union and some are forced only into civil unions.

- "The office workers didn't know how to 'work' civil unions in the computer. My wife and I ended up waiting more than an hour to finally sign all of the paperwork."
- "The clerk filling out the form for the couple next to us getting a marriage license was able to fill it out much faster than the guy who was filling out our civil union."
- "They got the dates wrong on the license: it made me a year younger, my wife a year older, and the year wrong."

There is confusion regarding out-of-state marriages being recognized as civil unions.

- "I'm still not 100% certain that our 2004 Canada marriage equals a civil union. We have been told that our marriage counts as a civil union and that we don't need (and can't get) a civil union license. But so many of the descriptions of this refer to 'honoring marriages from other states as civil unions' but not specifically honoring marriages from other countries."
- "We were married in Toronto in 2005 so we are automatically considered 'civil unioned' in Illinois. We did go to the County Clerk's office to inquire and were met with a warm welcome but no information when we asked 'What, if anything, do we need to do to be considered civil unioned in Illinois if we were married in Canada?'"

OTHER CHALLENGES

One in seven respondents encountered serious challenges in other areas of life, whether it is seeking public assistance, obtaining additional legal protections before traveling outside of Illinois, or navigating the immigration system for the non-American citizen in the couple.

Civil union protections end when traveling outside of Illinois. Civil union couples must obtain additional legal protections, such as health care power of attorney and medical directives.

- “Traveling to other states/countries is stressful because every jurisdiction treats our marriage/civil union differently. We always travel with a stack of legal papers and even then don’t know if they will be recognized.”
- “We travel with papers whenever we leave the state as added protection, something straight couples don’t have to do.”
- “US Customs treated us as if we were single.”

Unlike U.S. citizens in heterosexual marriages, who are able to sponsor their spouse for immigration, U.S. citizens in a civil union are not allowed to sponsor their partners for immigration. This forces loving, committed couples into traumatic situations, of either living apart or sending the U.S. citizen into exile.

- “[We have] immigration and job permit issues associated with the bi-nationality of our partnership.”
- “My partner is exiled in another country because of DOMA. I have no way of bringing him to the United States on a permanent basis.”

Fully one out of every three respondents receiving public assistance or food stamps experienced problems due to their civil union status.

- “I was discouraged to enter a union.”
- “IDHS (Illinois Department of Human Services) never called us back to finish the application process.”

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF UNEQUAL STATUS

Virtually every couple in a civil union has had to navigate complex social implications and live with the stigma of the unequal status. In fact, every second couple in a civil union experienced difficulty getting their relationship recognized or treated as equal to marriage.

Society, used to the concept of marriage as embodiment of love and commitment, does not see civil unions as a commitment of equal status to marriage.

- “No one was homophobic or against it, but also no one traveled to attend it [our ceremony] because it just didn’t seem as official. It wasn’t a big deal and they ‘were sure we’d be fine if they couldn’t be there.’”
- “Even though we had been fully committed to one another for four years, some of our family members did not understand why it would be important for us to get a civil union. They chose not to attend the ceremony, which was painful to us.”
- “I don’t think our friends and family completely understand how a civil union is like a marriage. Its implications are not clear to most people.”

The public at large does not comprehend the comparable significance of marriage and civil unions.

- “It is not recognized as equal and only those who have been ‘trained’ act as if it is anything of significance. I do not feel as though my civil union is even half of what a marriage would be. How do I introduce my partner to people?”
- “I missed a day of work because of the ceremony, and I thought that if I had been getting married that my supervisor would not have asked me if I could still attend a meeting on the Friday of the wedding weekend.”
- “People don’t understand what a civil union is. I live on the border next to St. Louis, Missouri. As soon as I cross the river, it is moot.”
- “On the whole, it’s not the same. People know it’s not the same, they don’t treat it the same.”

Many individuals and institutions use the inequality between civil unions and marriage to justify treating same-sex relationships differently.

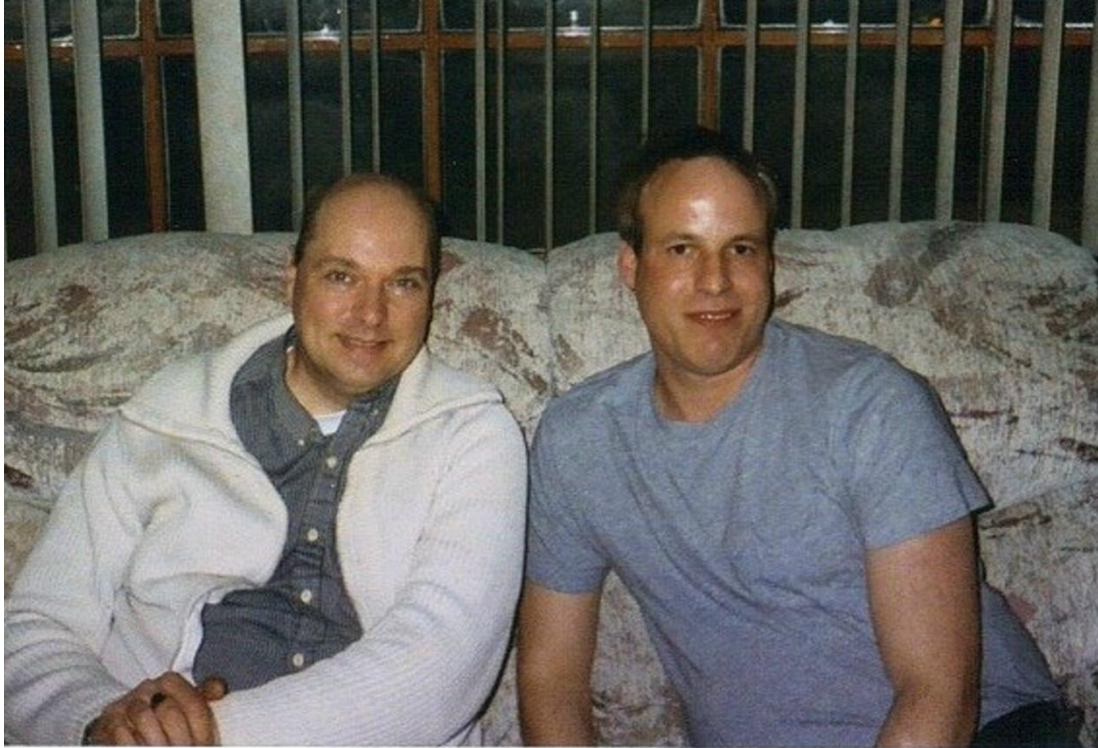
- “I had a problem with a doctor for my wife that would not discuss her health issues with me because of not being ‘married’ even though I worked with him and he knew we had a civil union.”
- “Some people continue to call it a civil union, quickly pointing out that it ‘isn’t really marriage.’”
- “It is always awkward filling out paperwork because we never know what box to check; we are not single, married, or widowed.”
- “There is no category that accurately represents the civil union. I always ask and am always instructed to check “other” as the relationship. That is definitely not being treated anywhere near marriage.”

PERSONAL STORIES



“I think marriage equality means just that; EQUALITY. Marriage equality for all, at the federal and state level, without regard to gender identity or sexual orientation. We MUST be treated as equal and not second class citizens. How is my love for my husband, different than a heterosexual couple? It's NOT. It's the same.”

- Michael Snell and Derrick Sorles



“Marriage equality would mean an equal hand in our family affairs, especially with our siblings... Got to get through another day. Make it equal.”

- Mike and Bob

“We want full civil rights and want to make sure our granddaughters understand what ‘full’ means in the world of law and society. To be married under federal law would guarantee complete and full equality; not partial, not kind of, but total. Only then can we say proudly that Americans are all equal under law.”

- Katherine E. Hoyne and Katherine L. Schwartz

“I believe in marriage equality as my spouse and I are currently setting the example of what a healthy relationship is for our daughter, yet she knows the federal government doesn't recognize the relationship. With marriage being equal for all, it benefits our family finances as well - currently we are paying extra every month for domestic partner benefits. In this struggling economy, our family needs this money.”

- Contributor wished to remain anonymous



“Marriage equality for my wife and I would mean that we would have the same rights as all other married couples. Filing income taxes this year was a headache and it is so unfair that I have to get taxed on the health benefits that my company provides to my wife, Michelle, because of federal laws. We just want to be treated the same as any other hetero-married couple.”

- Liliana



"For me and my partner Raul, marriage equality means the freedom to be ONE family. Raul is Ecuadorian. Because of DOMA, I cannot sponsor him for a green card. As an Ecuadorian, it's a struggle just to get him a tourist visa to come visit. As a result, I am leaving my family in the US to pursue my PhD studies in the UK where the two of us will be welcomed as a couple. For me and my family, marriage equality will mean bridging borders--a return from exile."

- Brad Mattan

"Marriage equality for same sex relationships is the only way of allowing the same benefits afforded heterosexuals; having been in a 37 year relationship and planning to continue in this relationship for the entire of our lives, we should be afforded the same opportunities. 'Marriage' for us doesn't constitute anything more than an acknowledgement that our relationship is as important as anyone else's; it's time that we start affording everyone our constitutional rights of 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' Marriage equality would fulfill those rights."

- Contributor wished to remain anonymous



“For my family marriage equality means that my love for my wife is accepted by the government at the federal, state, and local level. Equally romantic is having access to my wife's social security, guaranteed hospital visitation, federal tax breaks, and other federal benefits that my heterosexual married friends receive. Also, just being an average family that can check off the married box on forms and not having to write in civil unioned or the domestic partnered options.”

- Elana Jacobs and Helen Bildires



“Marriage equality would mean access to rights, laws, protection and dignity as a family. We walk in truth, honesty, and respect in the world and ask that the state we live in do the same for us and provide rights and protect us all as equal citizens.”

- Nancy Wentink and Debbie Moloney

“Marriage equality would mean peace of mind for my family. My wife and I wouldn't have to worry about if our two sons will be able to receive all available rights, benefits, and support in the event that something should happen to either of us. Marriage equality means that my sons won't be treated as second-class citizens because they have two moms.”

- Suzanne Dunne and Amy Bessette

“Marriage equality would mean so much to everyone in our family. My partner and I love each other and our daughter, who's ten and in the fourth grade. We are doing the best we can to make our family strong and stable to support our daughter, and having our family legally recognized would help a lot with that.”

- Contributors wished to remain anonymous



“Marriage equality would mean that our daughter would have the equal protections the 1200+ marriage rights afford to families. Marriage equality means that our family could make health insurance decisions free from discrimination caused by unfair tax policies for spousal benefits of same-gender couples.”

- Ravi & Tim Grivois-Shah

“It [marriage equality] would remove the stereotypical comments from our straight friends that still don't get it. It would also lend the federal backing to be treated as first class citizens finally.”

- Tammy E Taylor

“Marriage equality means recognizing the rights of all married/civil unioned gay couples federally and across state lines - as we already do for heterosexual couples. It means never having to explain to our daughter that if we go from the Illinois to Indiana border her parents are no longer considered married. Most importantly, it allows us to show society real family values from parents that had to go through much more to have a family.”

- Heidi Okerlund, Amber Hackett, & Emerson Okerlund-Hackett



“Marriage equality would mean we finally have all the same civil rights as everyone else I know is entitled to. That means practical things, like being able to file our taxes as a married couple, having automatic custody over one another's children and not having to spend thousands of dollars on second parent adoptions and powers of attorney, having automatic rights in hospitals, etc. But beyond that it would be the internal knowledge, the certainty that finally we are the same as everyone else and are as protected/recognized as all other citizens of our nation, something that should have been a given since the day I was born here.”

- Kati and Esther Baruja

“Marriage equality would be a validation under the law that we are indeed equivalent to married heterosexuals in every possible way. Any vestiges of shame, embarrassment, secrecy, etc. would be erased forever. Obviously, we would be thrilled to have all of the rights which are due to us as equal citizens, thus enhancing our lives in many ways. Finally, we can say to our married family members that our (24 year) relationship is just as legitimate as theirs.”

- Marcia Siegal, M.D.



“My wife Kim and I were married in 2008 in Massachusetts. We wanted to get married somewhere where it was legal even though it wouldn't be recognized in Illinois, so we were thrilled when the Civil Union Law went into effect here in Illinois in 2011. Since then we have given birth to a beautiful baby boy that is the joy of our lives. It would be so nice to have the same benefits of a marriage that a heterosexual couple have. We hate the thought of having to explain to our son someday why things are different for his mommies. Civil Union rights basically do nothing for us and it does not protect us in other states that do not recognize gay marriage.”

- Cindy Lechin and Kim King



“Laws that do not treat people equally in essence empower people to be prejudiced. Laws that treat people equally dissipate prejudice and hatred. We have been together for 36 years. I have attached a photo from the surprise anniversary party that our tour group threw us last year in Ireland...the question they all asked was ‘Anniversary of **what?**’ Why is the answer to that question so complicated? It does not need to be!!”
- Russell Lipari and Ronald Steinacher