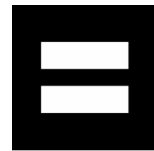


Equal Marriage Rights for Same-Sex Couples

Answers To Questions About Faith and Fairness

A publication by the Human Rights Campaign's FamilyNet Project



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A Message from HRC President Cheryl Jacques

When I kiss my children good night after a long day's work, I sometimes wonder what they will learn in school about this moment in history – when Americans are wrestling, once again, with questions about who should have access to one of the most cherished, joyful freedoms in the world, the freedom to marry.

I am confident that in the end, my sons will learn that the American people did right by all our nation's families, including their own – and I look forward to the day that they can know that their moms -- my partner, Jenn, and I -- are married not only in our hearts and souls but under law.

Until that day comes, like millions of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Americans, I will continue to wake up thinking about how I can best protect my family *without* the enormous array of protections that come with the right to marry. For example, how can I ensure security for my family knowing that my partner, who is at home with our children, would be heavily taxed on any retirement plan she may inherit from me because we are not considered a family under law? How can I possibly compensate for the fact that she would not even be eligible for Social Security survivor benefits upon my death? And how will I be able to protect my family and keep it strong without the more than 1,000 federal protections afforded other families that are allowed to marry?

I know that marriage rights for same-sex couples raise difficult questions for some people in our country. But I have great faith in the American people. I know that we have walked this path before. In fact, almost every step we have ever taken to advance civil rights in this country has shaken our world a little at first – until we saw, as history has repeatedly shown us, that bringing more people into America's embrace of equality for all strengthens us all. The same is true for marriage equality. To paraphrase Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the righting of an injustice anywhere is an extension of justice everywhere.

Cheryl A. Jacques
President
Human Rights Campaign

10 facts about same-sex couples

1. Same-sex couples live in 99.3 percent of all counties nationwide.
2. There are an estimated 3,136,921 same-sex couples living in the United States.
3. Fifteen percent of these same-sex couples live in rural settings.
4. One out of three lesbian couples is raising children. One out of five gay male couples is raising children.
5. Between 1 million and 9 million children are being raised by gay, lesbian and bisexual parents in the United States today.
6. At least one same-sex couple is raising children in 96 percent of all counties nationwide.
7. The highest percentages of same-sex couples raising children live in the South. Among those states with the highest percentages: Mississippi, South Dakota and Utah.
8. Nearly one in four same-sex couples include a partner 55 years old or older, and nearly one in five same-sex couples is composed of two people 55 or older.
9. More than one in 10 same-sex couples include a partner 65 years old or older, and nearly one in 10 same-sex couples is composed of two people 65 or older.
10. The states with the highest numbers of same-sex senior couples are also the most popular for heterosexual senior couples: California, New York and Florida

These facts are based on analyses of the 2000 U.S. Census conducted by the Urban Institute and Human Rights Campaign.

Why do same-sex couples want to marry?

“How do you break it to a child that the land of the free does not allow us to be free to be a legal family? In my children’s pure loving heart, we are all the same.”

(Cara Wilson, Ohio lesbian mother of three)

Many same-sex couples want the right to legally marry because they are in love, or because they just met the love of their lives or, more likely, have spent the last 10, 20 or 50 years with that person – and want to honor their relationship in the greatest way our society has to offer, by making a public commitment to stand together in good times and bad, through all the joys and challenges family life brings.

Many others want the right to marry because they are parents and know that marriage offers children a vital safety net, guaranteeing them protections that unmarried parents never could.

And still other people – both gay and straight – are fighting for the right of same-sex couples to marry because they recognize that it is simply not fair to deny some families the protections all other families are eligible to receive.

Currently in the United States, same-sex couples in long-term, committed relationships pay higher taxes and are denied basic protections and rights granted to married couples. Among them:

- > **Hospital visitation.** Married couples have the automatic right to visit each other in the hospital and make medical decisions. Same-sex couples can be denied the right to visit a sick or injured loved one in the hospital.
- > **Social Security benefits.** Married people receive Social Security payments upon the death of a spouse. Despite paying payroll taxes, gay and lesbian workers receive no Social Security survivor benefits – resulting in an average annual income loss of \$5,528 upon the death of a partner.
- > **Health insurance.** Many public and private employers provide medical coverage to the spouses of their employees, but most employers do not provide coverage to the life partners of gay and lesbian employees. Gay employees who *do* receive health coverage for their partners must pay federal income taxes on the value of the insurance.
- > **Estate taxes.** A married person automatically inherits all the property of his or her deceased spouse without paying estate taxes. A gay or lesbian taxpayer is forced to pay estate taxes on property inherited from a deceased partner.
- > **Retirement savings.** While a married person can roll a deceased spouse’s 401(k) funds into an IRA without paying taxes, a gay or lesbian American who inherits a 401(k) can end up paying up to 70 percent of it in taxes and penalties.
- > **Family leave.** Married workers are legally entitled to unpaid leave from their jobs to care for an ill spouse. Gay and lesbian workers are not entitled to family leave to care for their partners.
- > **Nursing homes.** Married couples have a legal right to live together in nursing homes. Because they are not legal spouses, elderly gay or lesbian couples do not have the right to spend their last days living together in nursing homes.
- > **Home protection.** Laws protect married seniors from being forced to sell their homes to pay high nursing home bills; gay and lesbian seniors have no such protection.
- > **Pensions.** After the death of a worker, most pension plans pay survivor benefits only to a legal spouse of the participant. Gay and lesbian partners are excluded from such pension benefits.

Why aren't civil unions enough?

Comparing marriage to civil unions is a bit like comparing diamonds to rhinestones. One is, quite simply, the real deal; the other is not. Consider:

- > Couples eligible to *marry* may have their marriage performed in any state and have it recognized in every other state in the nation and every country in the world.
- > Couples who are joined in a *civil union* in Vermont (the only state that offers civil unions) have no guarantee that its protections will even travel with them to neighboring New York or New Hampshire – let alone California or any other state.

Civil unions are not separate but equal -- they are separate *and* unequal.

Moreover, even couples who have a civil union and remain in Vermont receive only second-class protections in comparison to their married friends and neighbors. While they receive state-level protections, they do not receive any of the *more than 1,000 federal benefits and protections* of marriage.

In short, civil unions are not separate but equal – they are separate *and* unequal. And our society has tried separate before. It just doesn't work.

Marriage:	Civil unions:
State grants marriage licenses to couples.	State would grant civil union licenses to couples.
Couples receive legal protections and rights under state and federal law.	Couples receive legal protections and rights under state law only.
Couples are recognized as being married by the federal government and all state governments.	Civil unions are not recognized by other states or federal government.
Religious institutions are not required to recognize marriages or perform marriage ceremonies.	Religious institutions are not required to recognize civil unions or perform civil union ceremonies.

“I believe God meant marriage for men and women. How can I support marriage for same-sex couples?”

Many people who believe in God – and fairness and justice for all – ask this question. They feel a tension between religious beliefs and democratic values that has been experienced in many different ways throughout our nation’s history. That is why the framers of our Constitution established – and we as a people have repeatedly reaffirmed – the principle of separation of church and state. That principle applies no less to the marriage issue than it does to any other.

Indeed, the answer to the apparent dilemma between religious beliefs and support for equal protections for all families lies in recognizing that marriage has a significant religious meaning for many people, but that it is also a legal contract. And it is strictly the legal -- not the religious -- dimension of marriage that is being debated now.

Granting marriage rights to same-sex couples would not require Christian, Jewish, Muslim or any other religions to perform these marriages. People of faith would remain free to make their own judgments about what makes a marriage made in the eyes of God – just as they are today.

Granting marriage rights to same-sex couples would *not* require Christian, Jewish, Muslim or any other religions to perform these marriages. It would not require churches, synagogues or other religious institutions to permit these ceremonies to be held on their grounds. It would not even require that religious

communities discuss the issue. People of faith would remain free to make their own judgments about what makes a marriage made in the eyes of God – just as they are today.

Consider, for example, the difference in how the Catholic Church and the U.S. government view couples who have divorced and remarried. Because church tenets do not sanction divorce, the second marriage is not valid in the church’s view. The government, however, recognizes the marriage by extending to the remarried couple the same rights and protections of marriage as those granted to every other married couple in America. In this situation – as would be the case in marriage for same-sex couples – the church remains free to establish its own teachings on the religious dimension of marriage while the government upholds equality under law.

While each faith would remain free to make its own determination about same-sex relationships, it should also be noted that there are a growing number of religious communities that have searched their own consciences and decided to bless same-sex unions. Among them are Reform Judaism, Unitarian Universalists and the Metropolitan Community Church. The Presbyterian Church (USA) also allows ceremonies to be performed, although they are not considered the same as a marriage ceremony. And the Episcopal Church and United Church of Christ allow individual churches to set their own policies on same-sex unions.

“I strongly believe children need a mother and a father.”

Many of us grew up believing that everyone needs a mother and father, regardless of whether we ourselves happened to have two parents, or two *good* parents.

But as families have grown more diverse in recent decades, and researchers have studied how these different family relationships affect children, it has become clear that the *quality* of a family’s relationship is more important than the particular *structure* of families that exist today. In other words, the qualities that help a child grow into a good and responsible adult – learning how to learn, to have compassion for others, to contribute to society and be respectful of others and their differences – do not depend on the sexual orientation of their parents but on their parents’ ability to provide a loving, stable and happy home, something no class of Americans has an exclusive hold on.

**Organizations that Support
Same-Sex Parenting**

American Academy of Pediatrics
American Academy of Family Physicians
Child Welfare League of America
National Association of Social Workers
National Council on Adoptable Children
American Bar Association
American Psychological Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychoanalytic Association

That is why research studies have consistently shown that children raised by gay and lesbian parents do just as well on all conventional measures of child development, such as academic achievement, psychological well-being and social abilities, as children raised by heterosexual parents.

That is also why the nation’s leading child welfare organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians and others [see box], have issued statements that dismiss assertions that only heterosexual couples can be good parents -

- and declare that the focus should now be on providing greater protections for the 1 million to 9 million children being raised by gay and lesbian parents in the United States today.

Granting same-sex couples the right to marry, therefore, would enable the millions of same-sex parents raising children today to give their children what every child deserves – the safest, most secure environment possible, with all the legal protections that our country has put in place.

“This is different from interracial marriage. Sexual orientation is a choice.”

“We cannot keep turning our backs on gay and lesbian Americans. I have fought too hard and too long against discrimination based on race and color not to stand up against discrimination based on sexual orientation. I’ve heard the reasons for opposing civil marriage for same-sex couples. Cut through the distractions, and they stink of the same fear, hatred, and intolerance I have known in racism and in bigotry.”

Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., a leader of the black civil rights movement, writing in the Boston Globe, Nov. 25, 2003

Decades of research all point to the fact that sexual orientation is not a choice, and that a person’s sexual orientation cannot be changed. Who one is drawn to is a fundamental aspect of who we are.

In this way, the struggle for marriage equality for same-sex couples is just as basic as the fight for interracial marriage was. It recognizes that Americans should not be coerced into false and unhappy marriages but be free to marry the person they love – thereby building marriage on a true and stable foundation.

“Won’t this create a free-for-all and make the whole idea of marriage meaningless?”

Many people share this concern because opponents of gay and lesbian people have used this argument as a scare tactic. But it is not true. Granting same-sex couples the right to marry would in no way change the *number* of people who could enter into a marriage (or eliminate restrictions on the age or familial relationships of those who may marry). Marriage would continue to recognize the highest possible commitment that can be made between two adults, plain and simple.

“What would be wrong with a constitutional amendment to define marriage as a union of a man and woman?”

In more than 200 years of American history, the U.S. Constitution has been amended only 17 times since the Bill of Rights – and in each instance (except for Prohibition, which was repealed), it was to extend rights and liberties to the American people, not restrict them. For example, our Constitution was amended to end our nation’s tragic history of slavery. It was also amended to guarantee people of color, young people and women the right to vote.

Text of Proposed Federal Marriage Amendment:

“Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman.

Neither this [C]onstitution [n]or the constitution of any state, nor state or federal law, shall be construed to require that marital status or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon unmarried couples or groups.”

-- H.J. Resolution 56, introduced by Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, R-Colo., in May 2003. It has more than 100 co-sponsors. A similar bill was introduced in the U.S. Senate in November 2003.

The amendment currently under consideration (called the Federal Marriage Amendment) would be the only one that would single out one class of Americans for discrimination by ensuring that same-sex couples would not be granted the equal protections that marriage brings to American families.

Moreover, the amendment could go even further by stripping same-sex couples of some of the more limited protections they now have, such as access to health insurance for domestic partners and their children.

Neither enshrining discrimination in our Constitution nor stripping millions of families of basic protections would serve our nation’s best interest. The Constitution is supposed to protect and ensure equal treatment for *all* people. It should not be used to single out a group of people for different treatment.

“How could marriage for same-sex couples possibly be good for the American family – or our country?”

“We shouldn’t just allow gay marriage. We should insist on gay marriage. We should regard it as scandalous that two people could claim to love each other and not want to sanctify their love with marriage and fidelity.”

Conservative Columnist David Brooks, writing in The New York Times, Nov. 22, 2003.

The prospect of a significant change in our laws and customs has often caused people to worry more about possible dire consequences that could result than about the potential positive outcomes. In fact, precisely the same anxiety arose when some people fought to overturn the laws prohibiting

marriage between people of different races in the 1950s and 1960s. (One Virginia judge even declared that “God intended to separate the races.”)

But in reality, opening marriage to couples who are so willing to fight for it could only strengthen the institution for all. It would open the doors to more supporters, not opponents. And it would help keep the age-old institution alive.

As history has repeatedly proven, institutions that fail to take account of the changing needs of the population are those that grow weak; those that recognize and accommodate changing needs grow strong. For example, the U.S. military, like American colleges and universities, grew stronger not weaker after permitting African Americans and women to join its ranks.

Similarly, granting same-sex couples the right to marry would strengthen the institution of marriage by allowing it to better meet the needs of the true diversity of family structures in America today.

“Can’t same-sex couples go to a lawyer to secure all the rights they need?”

Not by a long shot. When a gay or lesbian person gets seriously ill, there is no legal document that can make their partner eligible to take leave from work under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act to provide care – because that law applies only to married couples.

When gay or lesbian people grow old and in need of nursing home care, there is no legal document that can give them the right to Medicaid coverage without causing their partner to be forced from their home – because the federal Medicaid law only permits married spouses to keep their home without becoming ineligible for benefits.

And when a gay or lesbian person dies, there is no legal document that can extend Social Security survivor benefits or the right to inherit a retirement plan without severe tax burdens that stem from being “unmarried” in the eyes of the law.

These are only a few examples of the critical protections that are granted through more than 1,000 federal laws that protect only married couples. In the absence of the right to marry, same-sex couples can only put in place a handful of the most basic arrangements, such as naming each other in a will or a power of attorney. And even these documents remain vulnerable to challenges in court by disgruntled family members.

“Won’t this cost taxpayers too much money?”

No, it wouldn’t necessarily cost much at all. In fact, treating same-sex couples as families under law could even *save* taxpayers money because marriage would require them to assume legal responsibility for their joint living expenses and reduce their dependence on public assistance programs, such as Medicaid, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, Supplemental Security Income disability payments and food stamps.

Put another way, the money it would cost to extend benefits to same-sex couples could be outweighed by the money that would be saved as these families rely more fully on each other instead of state or federal government assistance.

For example, two studies conducted in 2003 by professors at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and the University of California, Los Angeles, found that extending domestic partner benefits to same-sex couples in California and New Jersey would save taxpayers millions of dollars a year.

Specifically, the studies projected that the California state budget would save an estimated \$8.1 to \$10.6 million each year by enacting the most comprehensive domestic partner law in the nation. In New Jersey, which passed a new domestic partner law in 2004, the savings were projected to be even higher – more than \$61 million each year.

(Sources: “Equal Rights, Fiscal Responsibility: The Impact of A.B. 205 on California’s Budget,” by M. V. Lee Badgett, Ph.D., IGLSS, Department of Economics, University of Massachusetts, and R. Bradley Sears, J.D., Williams Project, UCLA School of Law, University of California, Los Angeles, May 2003, and “Supporting Families, Saving Funds: A Fiscal Analysis of New Jersey’s Domestic Partnership Act,” by Badgett and Sears with Suzanne Goldberg, J.D., Rutgers School of Law-Newark, December 2003.)

Where can same-sex couples marry today?

In 2001, the *Netherlands* became the first country to extend marriage rights to same-sex couples. *Belgium* passed a similar law two years later. The laws in both of these countries, however, have strict citizenship or residency requirements that do not permit American couples to take advantage of the protections provided.

U.S. law bars federal protections for same-sex married couples

So long as the 1996 federal “Defense of Marriage Act” (DOMA) stays in place, even same-sex couples who legally marry in Massachusetts, Canada or elsewhere would be denied Social Security survivor protections and the other more than 1,000 federal benefits available to heterosexual married couples. The law – which many legal scholars consider unconstitutional – states that the federal government will not recognize the marriage of same-sex couples, even if others states or countries do.

In June 2003, *Ontario* became the first Canadian province to grant marriage to same-sex couples, and in July 2003, *British Columbia* followed suit – becoming the first places that American same-sex couples could go to get married.

In September 2003, the *Massachusetts* Supreme Judicial Court recognized the right of same-sex couples to marry – calling on the state to begin issuing marriage licenses to

same-sex couples by May 17, 2004.

Other nations have also taken steps toward extending equal protections to all couples, though the protections they provide are more limited than marriage. *Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Portugal and Sweden* all have nationwide laws that grant same-sex partners the right to assume a range of important rights, protections and obligations.

For example, in France, registered same-sex (and opposite-sex) couples can be joined in a civil “solidarity pact” that grants them the right to file joint tax returns, extend their social security coverage to each other and receive the same health, employment and welfare benefits as legal spouses. It also commits the couple to assume joint responsibility for household debts.

Other countries, including Switzerland, Scotland and the Czech Republic, also have considered legislation that would legally recognize same-sex unions.

However, laws in this area are changing quickly. Please check inside the front pocket of this booklet for any updates.

What protections other than marriage are available to American same-sex couples?

At the federal level, there are no protections at all available to same-sex couples. In fact, a federal law called the “Defense of Marriage Act” (DOMA) says that the federal government will discriminate against same-sex couples who marry by refusing to recognize their marriages or providing them with the federal protections of marriage. Some members of Congress are also trying to go even further by trying to pass a Federal Marriage Amendment that would write discrimination against same-sex couples into the U.S. Constitution.

At the state level, only Vermont offers civil unions, which provide important state benefits but no federal protections, such as Social Security survivor benefits. There is also no guarantee that civil unions will be recognized outside Vermont. Thirty-seven states also have “defense of marriage” laws explicitly prohibiting the recognition of marriages between same-sex partners.

Domestic partner laws have been enacted in California, Connecticut, New Jersey, Hawaii and the District of Columbia. The benefits conferred by these laws vary; some offer access to family health insurance, others confer co-parenting rights. These benefits are limited to residents of the state. A family that moves out of these states immediately loses the protections.

“I agree. Every family deserves equal protections. How can I help?”

Great, we need you! Here are 10 things you can do.

1. Urge your members of Congress to oppose the Federal Marriage Amendment, or any constitutional amendment to ban marriage for same-sex couples. Make a personal visit if you can. HRC’s field team can help you. Or fax a message through HRC’s Action Network. Visit www.hrc.org and click on “Take Action.”
2. Sign the Million for Marriage petition at www.millionformarriage.org
3. Ask 10 friends and family members to do the same.
4. Talk to your friends and family members about the importance of marriage for same-sex couples and their children. Recent polls of the GLBT community show that many of us have not yet talked to parents, siblings or other family members about the discrimination we face. Yet nothing moves the hearts and minds of potential straight allies more than hearing the stories of someone they know who is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. For more information, download “Talking about Marriage Equality” from HRC’s Online Action Center.
5. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper saying why you support marriage for same-sex couples and why a constitutional amendment against it is a bad idea.
6. Next time you hear someone say marriage is only meant for heterosexual couples, speak up. If you hear this on a radio program, call in. If you hear it on TV, call or send an e-mail. If it comes up in conversation, set the record straight.
7. Host a house party to educate your friends and family about marriage equality. Invite a diverse group and inspire them to write letters to Congress and your state government at your house party. Visit www.hrc.org to receive a house party kit.

8. Meet with clergy and other opinion leaders in your community and ask them to join you in speaking out in support of marriage equality and against the Federal Marriage Amendment. Let HRC know the results. E-mail field@hrc.org.
9. Share your story about why marriage equality matters to you and send it to HRC's family project at familynet@hrc.org. Personal stories are what move hearts and minds.
10. Become a member of HRC and support our work on behalf of marriage equality. Visit www.hrc.org

**Excerpts From 2003 *Goodridge* Decision
Recognizing the Right of Same-sex Couples to Marry in Massachusetts**

Marriage and family choices are matters of personal liberty

“Whether and whom to marry, how to express sexual intimacy, and whether and how to establish a family – these are among the most basic of every individual’s liberty and due process rights.”

The fight for marriage rights for same-sex couples is not an attack on marriage

“Here, the plaintiffs seek only to be married, not to undermine the institution of civil marriage. They do not want marriage abolished. They do not attack the binary nature of marriage, the consanguinity provisions, or any of the other gate-keeping provisions of the marriage licensing law.”

Barring same-sex couples from marriage violates their liberty and equality under law

“Barred access to the protections, benefits, and obligations of civil marriage, a person who enters into an intimate, exclusive union with another of the same sex is arbitrarily deprived of membership in one of our community’s most rewarding and cherished institutions. That exclusion is incompatible with the constitutional principles of respect for individual autonomy and equality under law.”

Prohibiting same-sex couples from marrying harms children

“Excluding same-sex couples from civil marriage will not make children of opposite sex marriages more secure, but it does prevent children of same-sex couples from enjoying the immeasurable advantages that flow from the assurance of a stable family structure in which children will be reared, educating and socialized.”

“It cannot be rational under our laws, and indeed it is not permitted, to penalize children by depriving them of state benefits because the state disapproves of their parents’ sexual orientation.”

Constitutional law has repeatedly embraced people once excluded

“The history of constitutional law is the story of the extension of constitutional rights and protections to people once ignored or excluded. ... This statement is as true in the area of civil marriage as in any other area of civil rights.”

Ban may be rooted in prejudice alone

“The marriage ban works a deep and scarring hardship on a very real segment of the community for no rational reason. The absence of any reasonable relationship between, on the one hand, an absolute disqualification of same-sex couples who wish to enter into civil marriage, and on the other, protection of public health, safety, or general welfare, suggests that the marriage restriction is rooted in persistent prejudices against person who are (or who are believed to be) homosexual. ‘The Constitution cannot control such prejudices but neither can it tolerate them.’”

Marriage survives change

“Alarms about the imminent erosion of the ‘natural’ order of marriage were sounded over the demise of antimiscegenation laws, the expansion of the rights of married women, and the introduction of ‘no-fault’ divorce. Marriage has survived all these transformations, and we have no doubt that marriage will continue to be a vibrant and revered institution.”

Additional National Resources

Human Rights Campaign www.hrc.org

HRC is the nation's largest national organization working to advance equality based on sexual orientation and gender expression and identity to ensure that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans can be open, honest, and safe at home, at work and in their communities. Of particular interest to people following the marriage issue:

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation's FamilyNet project (www.hrc.org/familynet) offers the most comprehensive resources about gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender families, covering marriage, parenting, aging and more.

HRC's Action Center (www.hrcactioncenter.org), offers important updates about what's happening in legislatures nationwide and the latest online grassroots advocacy tools.

Other important resources include:

American Civil Liberties Union: www.aclu.org

The ACLU works daily in courts, legislatures and communities throughout the country to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties guaranteed by the Constitution and laws of the United States.

Freedom to Marry Collaborative: www.freedomtomarry.org

A gay and non-gay partnership working to win marriage equality nationwide.

Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE): www.colage.org

Fosters the growth of daughters and sons of LGBT parents by providing education, support and community, advocating for their rights and for the rights of their families, and by promoting acceptance and awareness in society.

Family Pride Coalition: www.familypride.org

A national education and civil rights organization that advances the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender parents and their families through mutual support, community collaboration and public understanding.

Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders: www.glad.org

The gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender legal organization that successfully brought the case that led to the civil union law in Vermont and the recognition of marriage equality in Massachusetts.

Gay & Lesbian Victory Fund: www.victoryfund.org

Committed to increasing the number of openly gay and lesbian public officials at federal, state and local levels of government by recruiting, training, and supporting openly LGBT candidates and officials.

Lambda Legal: www.lambdalegal.org

A national legal group committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of, and combating the discrimination against, the LGBT community, and people with HIV/AIDS, through impact litigation, education and public policy work.

Log Cabin Republicans: www.lcr.org

Operates within the Republican Party for the equal rights of all Americans, including gay men and women, according to the principles of limited government, individual liberty, individual responsibility, free markets and a strong national defense.

Marriage Equality U.S.A.: www.marriageequality.org

Works to secure the freedom and the right of same-sex couples to engage in civil marriage through a program of education, media campaigns and community partnerships.

National Center for Lesbian Rights: www.ncrights.org

A national legal resource center devoted to advancing the rights and safety of lesbians and their families through a program of litigation, public policy advocacy, free legal advice and counseling and public education.

National Gay & Lesbian Task Force: www.nglftf.org

Dedicated to building a national civil rights movement of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people through the empowerment and training of state and local leaders, and through the research and development of national policy.

National Latina/o Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Organization (LLEGO): www.llego.org

Develops solutions to social, health and political disparities that exist due to discrimination based on ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity affecting the lives and well-being of Latina/o LGBT people and their families.

Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays (PFLAG): www.pflag.org

Promotes the health and well-being of LGBT people, their families and friends, through support, education and advocacy with the intention of ending discrimination and securing equal civil rights.

Soulforce: www.soulforce.org

An interfaith movement committed to ending spiritual violence perpetuated by religious policies and teachings against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people through the application of the principles of non-violence as taught and lived by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches: www.mcchurch.org

A worldwide fellowship of Christian churches with a special outreach to the world's gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities.