

My name is Vanessa Bowling and I am the president of Rainbow Soul at Morgan State University. Today I wanted to tell you a little about me and my experience as a black lesbian. Other than the fact that I am the President of the schools Gay/Straight Alliance, I am also the proud student of a Historically Black University in Baltimore City, and the product of a biracial relationship. In October, I had the honor of speaking at the Maryland Black Family Alliance's press conference at Morgan State to introduce the Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Protection Act. I was interviewed that day by a reporter who asked me if my family was supportive of me. Immediately I wanted to tell her yes, considering my success in school, but when I realized she was referring to my sexuality, I told her that my mothers side of the family is very supportive of me, yet my fathers side, the African American side, has basically disowned me. Unfortunately I have come to find out that the same people, who only 40 years ago were being discriminated against and treated unequally, are now forgetting what civil rights really mean. I was honored to meet Senator Britt

in October and was instantly blown away by her desire and passion to make sure all people, especially Maryland residents, were treated equally under the law. Senator Britt was a true pioneer of civil rights and understood why the fight we are fighting now is the same as that which was fought years ago. Senator Britt had a dream that all residents would be able to get married in Maryland and I was excited because her dream was mine as well. When I was informed about Senator Britt's passing my heart fell and I felt true despair; I felt that without Senator Britt's support, many people would not have a face to put to an issue. I am asking you now that you put a face to this issue. Everyone who is here in front of you today are Maryland Residents who more than anything want the same rights as those that straight couples are awarded.

When I walk around campus I am constantly reminded of the great civil rights fight that we, as African Americans, went through. Although I was not alive for the fight, I am proud to say that my mother was and she brought me up to believe that everyone was created equally. People fought and fought for their rights and even

though they were abused and killed they never gave up. The same goes for the fight for LGBT rights. We have fought and fought and have been abused and killed but we too will not give up. I have seen that history repeats itself, and I'm looking forward to the day when we too get our civil rights. We are not who we love, but many people are trying to make who we love, who we are, but that is not the definition of equality. Being of a race that has constantly been discriminated against, I am appalled that we have become those who now discriminate. I implore you not to let the dreams of Senator Britt and the undying support of Coretta Scott King go to waist. Even though I was not alive for the first civil rights movement, I am proud to be an active participant in the civil rights movement of our time, and confident to say that we shall overcome.