

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 290 - THE RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM AND CIVIL MARRIAGE PROTECTION ACT
Senate Judicial Proceeding Committee, February 14, 2008**

Good afternoon to the esteemed members of this committee. I am sorry I cannot deliver this testimony in person. If I were with you this is what I would say. On behalf of my wife, Gwen, and our family I urge you to favorably report Senate Bill 290.

As you know, my wife was the original sponsor of the bill, and how I wish she were sitting here today telling you why we need to pass this now. From the moment I met my dear Gwen she was fighting for fairness and justice and never took a rest. Gwen never wavered in her belief that all people are created equally, endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, and should be allowed to live free from discrimination, exploitation and fear. As a deeply religious and convicted person, Gwen always fought hate, bigotry and discrimination in all of its forms. Becoming the sponsor on this bill was Gwen's next fight and she was ready to lead it. She felt very passionately about ending marriage discrimination against gay and lesbian couples. She saw as an issue of freedom and fairness; that it boils down to whether or not we will affirm the fundamental dignity of our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters and their families. This is about acknowledging that some of us, not too long ago, were told by our government we couldn't marry the "wrong" person and now we are doing the same thing to another group of citizens. It really doesn't matter what rationale or justification you give, it is still discrimination.

Many of us have or are struggling with this issue on a spiritual or religious level and I understand this. For you, I will share the words of my friend Rev. Joseph Lowery who has acknowledged being "in the valley of prayer on the issue of gay marriage." But, as a black man who was deeply involved in the struggle for equal rights, he is willing to "err on the side of inclusiveness, and not exclusion." He says, "I'm going to follow Jesus and say, whosoever will, let them come. And I'm going to extend rights to all of God's children. And if I'm wrong, God will have to judge me."

As you deliberate and pray on this bill I ask you to err on the side of inclusion and to extend rights to all of God's children and to pass Gwen's bill.

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