

**SUPPORT The Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage
Protection Act, SB 290**

**TESTIMONY OF BARBARA L. FISHBACK
4913 Continental Drive, Olney, Maryland 20832
BEFORE THE MARYLAND STATE SENATE
JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE
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I'm a Maryland mom blessed with two wonderful sons, and, like most moms, my "agenda" is to do everything I can to assure that they have safe and happy lives. My husband and I raised our sons in a religious home. They studied diligently and did well throughout their public school years. In fact, our older son was a Maryland Distinguished Scholar. Neither smoked, drank or did drugs. They both graduated from Ivy League universities with honors and are now responsible, productive young adults. As you can tell, I'm a pretty proud mom.

But, growing up, our sons were different from most of their peers, because they are both gay. I would like to share with you their story, in light of the current debate about marriage.

Both our sons realized their attraction to other boys when they were very young, only 10-years-old and in the 5th grade of elementary school—something we learned is quite typical of gay males. Both suffered alone,

anxious and in fear of themselves throughout middle school. In high school, both dated beautiful girls in the desperate hope that perhaps they could be attracted to them, to no avail. Finally, our younger son, at fifteen, felt he had to either commit suicide or like himself just the way he was. Fortunately, he chose to live. After confiding his secret to a friend, word got back to our older son who confronted him at home, asking if it were true that he was gay. When he said "yes," our older son admitted that he was keeping the same secret. They held each other and cried for the pain that they knew the other had endured. Out of their love for us, they planned that our younger son would "come out" first. Our older son stayed in the closet for several more years until he felt we could handle knowing that both of our beloved sons were gay.

Our sons have told us that growing up they never envisioned joyful lives for themselves. Just lives of loneliness, fear and pain.

Now in their twenties and no longer hiding, our sons are the happiest we have ever known them to be. As their mom, I do not want them to live alone, without that one special person to share the joys and sorrows of life. And I want them to have all of the rights and responsibilities that come with such a commitment. I want them to have those rights in Maryland, so that they can return here and be close to us -- and be assets to our State.

It pains me to think that thousands of Maryland's gay children are struggling at this very moment to envision happy lives for themselves. It is critical to all of Maryland's children, gay and straight alike, that they be able to envision being married, not anything less. This is not just an adult issue about rights and responsibilities and justice denied. It is also an issue about children and how they view themselves and their future.

My sons experienced a painful and anxious childhood, living in fear of themselves - - lives which held out to them only society's scorn. I believe the time has come for the Maryland Legislature to give our gay children a new and brighter future.

Thank you for taking the time to listen. You hold the key to so much happiness.