

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB290

File code: Family Law

Thursday, February 14, 2008

Rev. Lisa Ward

Esteemed Senators of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

My name is Lisa Ward, and I am testifying on behalf of the Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland, representing several hundred individuals and member congregations throughout the state, who join me in supporting SB290. This bill, which serves to codify religious freedom and civil marriage protection for all Marylanders, is an important advancement toward the full realization of civic and religious liberty, as proclaimed in the preamble of our State's Declaration of Rights.

The task before you is simple, although sometimes the simplest things are the hardest to do. Supporting this bill means expanding your constitutional vision and your sense of welcome to include all of your constituents.

This bill is about equal rights. It is about the even hand of law and the long arm of justice. It may be about suspending how you personally think life should be while choosing a healthy embrace of how things are. It is about equity and compassion in human relations.

Your religion may encourage you to reject the ways of others or promote "tough love" exclusion from the fold. That is your right. You may exclude or include anyone you choose within the confines of religious establishments. However, within the confines of these distinguished halls, you may not exclude others on the basis of preference, value judgment or opinion.

Equality is simple, though it is rarely easy. Your entrusted role in government calls for a juggle of constituents that is admirable. So it does not follow that the full participation of same gender families is denied in this "Free State" of Maryland.

What is the legal logic of a blanket disapproval of the marriages of your gay and lesbian constituents? Their tax money is spent. Their votes are counted. Their services in all walks of life are received.

Telling our LGBT citizens that they cannot participate in society in the same way that heterosexuals can undermines the moral imperative of justice and equity. Moreover it hurts our children to witness such discrimination which is harmful to the fabric of a free society.

Most lawmakers agree that the family is a vital institution which promotes health and safety in society. Exclusive access to the institution of marriage creates unequal support in the building and nurturing of families. Why on earth would we want to weaken some of our families by denying them the legal support that will help our society thrive?

An answer to this query on religious grounds is neither equitable in the eyes of the law, nor consistent with present practices.

The law can sanction marriages that come out of divorce – some religions don't. The law can sanction interfaith marriages – some religions don't. The law even sanctions marriages that will not produce offspring, for varied reasons – some religions don't. So it is simply time for the law to sanction gay marriage – which some religions won't.

As Unitarian Universalists, we understand the intricacies of freedom of religious belief, and strive to respect the faith journeys of others. That is why we don't tell our representatives to have the same faith as we do, or the same interpretation of the Bible as we might, or the same image of God. We know it is possible, in fact it is imperative, that faith understandings are given room enough to stay away from societal law.

We also offer ourselves as good reminders to our lawmakers that there is diversity of religious belief within their constituency, and that playing favorites amongst religious believers is not sound legislation.

I urge you to support this worthy bill, strengthening the fabric of freedom and justice for all within this great state of Maryland.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Rev. Lisa Ward
Board Member, Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry
revuufhc@verizon.net
410-734-7122