

Good evening and thank you for taking the time to listen to me today. My name is Kate Oliver. I am the mother of two, a licensed clinical social worker, and I have been married to my husband for six years. I am also one of the estimated six to fourteen million children of gay parents in the United States. I am here to speak out about the importance of keeping discrimination out of our state constitution.

People who disagree with recognizing the glbt community as equal citizens with the same rights and protections as the rest of the population often cite that they are protecting the children. Well, I am here today to say discrimination against the community that loved me and raised me without conditions does not protect me, my family of origin, or my children and I will illustrate to you what I mean.

I believe my parents would agree that they would have divorced even if my father were not gay. They divorced when I was four and when I was seven my mother remarried a man who eventually went to jail for child abuse. Before that time, my father had been advised by his attorney's that he had no chance for visitation more than once a week and every other weekend as my mother was not agreeable to more than that. He had been advised that it was in his best interest not to let me or my siblings know that he was gay and that he should be happy with any time with us he got. My father was allowed to show no affection to Bob around us, and was scared to even let me or my siblings know where Bob slept. The lessons we learned were that there are some things it is not okay to talk about, and pretending things are okay is the way to deal with difficulty. My step father sexually abused me for two years. I was a good pretender.

When my father found out about the abuse, he and his partner, Bob, became my advocates. They went back to court to request joint custody and won. My dad told me he was gay. Let me tell you also, that the day my father told me he was gay, I will never forget. He sat me down and told me he had something important he had to tell me. By the look on his face, I thought he was going to tell me someone had died. He was that scared to tell me. When he told me he is gay, I waited for the next part of what he was going to say that was going to be the bad news. It took me a moment to realize that was the news. It didn't even matter to me, what mattered was that he and Bob loved and cared for me. We both started living our lives more honestly. My father and Bob have been together 25 years now. They have shown me the meaning of integrity and family. Family cares for and loves one another even when things are hard. Family supports one another like when Bob quit his job to care for my children after I had my first daughter so I could keep the job I love without worrying about who my children were with.

After I came to Annapolis to testify against House Bill 48, the so called Defense of Marriage Act, my father, thanked me for testifying. I told him he was welcome but that I had not done it for him. I did it for me, and all the other me's out there who are not being protected or "defended" by these bills.

Every day in my work, I see people who have not been loved by their parents, not been cared for. Love does not hurt children. It is not the structure of the family but the quality of the relationships between the family members. That is why I ask you to represent the humanitarian notion that we all have a right to equal protection under the law. And to recognize that by supporting discrimination you are not only hurting gay men and lesbians, but you are supporting the notion that this group of people and their families are less than, and not worthy of the same types of recognized, protected

relationships as the heterosexual community. I lost eleven years of having my father and Bob fully in my life, please do not allow this to happen to another child. Thank you.