

Freedom to Marry E-Update
Issue #12 | March 1, 2006

Contents:

- 1) A Note from Executive Director, Evan Wolfson
- 2) On the Horizon: A Women's History Month message from NOW
- 3) Landscape: NY leader to gay funders: Get more for your money from candidates you support
- 4) Get Engaged: We need volunteers!

1) A Note from Executive Director Evan Wolfson

Dear Friend of Freedom to Marry --

Along with the intangible and precious security, clarity, and dignity that marriage can bring to a committed couple in love, a 2004 government study found that there are at least 1,138 ways in which marriage triggers federal consequences, including important protections and responsibilities in every area of life. This is in addition to fifty sets of state laws that, when added to the federal, make marriage the gateway to access to health care and medical decision-making for a partner and children, parenting and immigration rights, inheritance rules, Social Security and other government benefits, a system for ending a relationship while protecting both parties, and the ability to pool resources or to buy or transfer property without adverse tax consequences -- to name just a few.

Marriage brings a safety-net that most Americans cherish in the ordinary ups and downs of life and in times of family emergency or hardship. The denial of marriage and its tangible protections and responsibilities causes real suffering to real people.

Take for instance a couple like Laurel Hester and Stacie Andree. You've probably already heard of them, thanks to the hard work of New Jersey's Garden State Equality. In 2005, after 23 years on the job as a detective for the Ocean County, prosecutor's office, Laurel Hester learned that she was dying of lung cancer. She asked the county freeholders to allow her to pass her pension on to her partner Stacie, which would "mean the difference in whether or not she can stay in the house," Laurel explained. Although the couple had registered as domestic partners, and this would have been her automatic right had they been allowed to marry, Laurel's deathbed request was denied.

Visibly dying, Laurel went public with her story in the hopes of righting the wrong--and after a protracted battle won the right to pass her pension on to her partner just a few hard weeks before her death on Saturday, February 18th. But Laurel and Stacie should never have had to compound the pain and grief of Laurel's dying with the need to fight for what other couples have. Their ordeal and this injustice illustrate another reason why marriage matters, and why ending discrimination in marriage is a question of basic fairness.

Same-sex couples willing to take on the commitment and responsibilities of marriage should not be denied the opportunity to build a life together and pursue happiness with the partner they love. Nor should their children and families suffer the economic hardships and disadvantages that come with exclusion from marriage.

Read more about the freedom to marry as a question of economic justice in my essay "For Richer, For Poorer", hosted by the Drum Major Institute for Public Policy.

-- Evan Wolfson

Follow developments in the movement for marriage equality on our website

(www.freedomtomarry.org), and in future issues of Freedom to Marry's bi-monthly E-Update.

LINKS:

- * Garden State Equality - <http://www.gardenstateequality.org/>
- * "For Richer, For Poorer" - <http://www.drummajorinstitute.org/library/article.php?ID=5518>
- * Drum Major Institute for Public Policy - <http://www.drummajorinstitute.org/home.php>
- * "Why Marriage Matters: America, Equality, and Gay People's Right to Marry" - Evan Wolfson - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/node.asp?id=3470>
- * Resources - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/node.asp?id=3466>

~~~~~  
2) ON THE HORIZON: A Women's History Month message from NOW: Marriage equality is a feminist issue  
~~~~~

In 1995 NOW became one of the first progressive organizations to affirm the choice of marriage as a fundamental right that should not be denied to same-sex couples. Since that time, NOW has been one of the organizations at the forefront of the struggle for marriage equality. Our message is that marriage equality is not only a feminist issue but also a constitutionally protected right under the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment. NOW has taken this position because we believe that until all women are free to make their own choices and exercise their rights, none of us are free to do so. This stand is one of the hallmarks of the women's movement.

So, during Women's History Month and beyond, join the fight for marriage equality. It is the feminist thing to do!

-- Special to Freedom to Marry by Lisa Weiner-Mahfuz, Senior Field Organizer, National Organization for Women

LINKS:

- * More - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/document.asp?id=4073>
- * NOW - <http://www.now.org/>
- * Equal Marriage NOW - <http://www.now.org/issues/marriage/index.html>
- * Women's History Month - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_History_Month

~~~~~  
3) LANDSCAPE: NY leader to gay funders: Get more for your money from candidates you support.  
~~~~~

Last week, the NY Times reported on the strong leadership of Alan Van Capelle, director of New York's Empire State Pride Agenda, who wrote that contributing to a fundraiser for Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton "send a message to other elected officials that you can be working against us during this critical time and not suffer a negative pushback from the gay community." He noted that unlike Clinton, most Democratic candidates running for statewide office in New York have embraced marriage equality, especially important now when cases involving couples are

reaching the state high court.

Too many party leaders, including but not limited to Senator Clinton, avoid making a substantive, moral case for what they stand for, and instead offer only non sequiturs ("I am for equality, but not for equality in marriage. ").

By depriving the reachable-but-not-yet-reached of the time and information they need and deserve, these Democrats have so far given the party the worst of both worlds: They have a product -- fairness for America's gay minority, including the freedom to marry -- and yet through their silence and evasion, fail to sell it.

LINKS:

- * More - http://www.gayalliance.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=216&Itemid=88
- * NY Times Article - <http://www.gaypasg.org/GayPASG/PressClippings/2006/Feb/Gay%20Rights%20Group%20Criticizes%20Senator%20Clinton's.htm>
- * Empire State Pride Agenda - <http://www.prideagenda.org/>
- * Alan Van Capelle - <http://www.prideagenda.org/staff/avancapelle.html>
- * Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton - <http://clinton.senate.gov/>

4) GET ENGAGED: We need volunteers!

Whether you can help out with an extra hand for event mailings or envelope stuffings, or donate time for data entry, web assistance, or research, your assistance is invaluable. If you live in or near New York City, Please contact Noran J. Camp, Office Administrator, at info@freedomtomarry.org or 212-851-8418 x5, with the days and hours you can be available, as well as your interests.

If your organization working for marriage equality needs volunteers, please email heather@freedomtomarry.org to post in our Volunteer/Job Opportunities section of our website.

Equality Maryland is seeking members for their Development Committee

Like to raise money? Want to chair some of Equality Maryland's upcoming fundraisers? Then join Equality Maryland's development committee and help sustain an organization that is working tirelessly to create positive change for LGBT Marylanders and our families. To learn more, send an email to Dan@EqualityMaryland.org.

LINKS:

- * More - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/node.asp?id=3510>
- * Volunteer/Job Opportunities - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/stories/page1.asp>
- * Equality Maryland - <http://www.equalitymaryland.org/index.htm>

QUOTE:

eupdate12_text

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

SIGN-UP:

If you received this E-Update from a friend or family member and find it a useful resource on marriage equality, sign-up on the Freedom to Marry website to get E-Updates, visit: http://www.freedomtomarry.org/e_update.asp

Pass it on!

~~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*