

Freedom to Marry E-Update
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- 1) A Note from Evan Wolfson

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Dear friends -

With wind in our sails from the unanimous New Jersey Supreme Court ruling and November's election results, which showed that standing up for gay people and the freedom to marry did not hurt politicians, we head into what should be a transformative 2007 with renewed momentum.

Heroic efforts are underway in New Jersey as our partners at Garden State Equality - joined by a united front of groups such as Lambda Legal, the Task Force, HRC, the ACLU and many others -- fight to secure full and equal marriage instead of a separate, lesser, or substitute legal status. As the legislature moves now to implement the constitution's command of equality, couples and their kids are mounting an intense campaign to keep the governor and legislators from stampeding to civil union, rather than doing the right (and simple) thing and ending the exclusion from marriage.

In Maryland on Monday ACLU lawyer Ken Choe did a wonderful job arguing before the State Supreme Court in the case of Conaway v. Deane. Representing committed couples seeking to marry, Ken tackled head-on one of the errors made by the courts in NY and WA earlier this year, which talked about the meaning of marriage to non-gay people without addressing marriage's meaning for gay people, or explaining how keeping gay people out helped promote the value of marriage for anyone. "It is not enough that there is a reason for including the included class," said Ken. "There must also be a reason for excluding the excluded class." We hope for a favorable ruling for marriage equality from this court and others in 2007.

With historic legislative, court, and public education battles ahead in California, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Oregon, and others still ramping up in the new national climate, and with marriage work possible in all fifty states as part of the continuing national dialogue, 2007 promises to be momentous. A clear majority of Americans have come to understand that our families deserve and need recognition and protection; they continue to learn and wrestle with why marriage matters as part of our nation's promise of equality, liberty, and fairness. South Africa got there, and as the holidays approach, same-sex couples' marriages are now respected in Israel, the Holy Land. If they can get to the promised land, so can we.

LINKS:

* Garden State Equality - <http://www.gardenstateequality.org/>

* Election 2006 - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/node.asp?id=3709>

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2) Freedom to Marry Voice of Equality Marina Gatto in All Families Matter Ad in New York Times

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Freedom to Marry Voice of Equality Marina Gatto's family is one of three pictured in a full-page ad that ran 11/13/06 in The New York Times special section on philanthropy. View the ad here.

The ad states: Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people and families live everywhere and deserve basic human rights. Like others, they seek job security, freedom from harassment and violence, non-discrimination in housing and government services, protections for their families, and the freedom to marry. LGBT families want the same ability to contribute to, and participate in, all that our society has to offer. Despite these families' contributions and needs, only one-tenth of one percent of all foundation dollars comes to their aid. We thank those who are meeting the challenge to end discrimination and promote progress. And we invite all members of the nonprofit and philanthropic community to learn more and do more to meet the real needs of all families.

To find out more, and how you can get involved, email AllFamiliesMatter@lgbtfunders.org or check out their website.

LINKS:

- * Family Matters ad - <http://www.lgbtfunders.org/lgbtfunders/docs/FamiliesMatter.pdf>
- * LGBT Funders - <http://www.lgbtfunders.org/lgbtfunders/familiesmatter.htm>

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3) Sustaining and Advancing the Movement for Marriage Equality

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Renewing efforts to end the exclusion of same-sex couples from marriage in California, Assemblymember Mark Leno, D-San Francisco, introduced on December 4 the Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Protection Act. The bill, sponsored by Equality California (EQCA), would allow same-sex couples to obtain a marriage license from their county clerk.

"All loving, committed couples deserve not only the legal protections that marriage provides, but also the dignity that marriage affords," said EQCA Executive Director Geoff Kors. "The time has come to end the exclusion of same-sex couples from marriage. This legislation validates loving relationships and strengthens California families by honoring the commitments of every couple under law."

LINKS:

- * EQCA - <http://www.eqca.org/site/apps/nl/newsletter2.asp?c=9oINKWMCF&b=40337>
- * Assemblymember Mark Leno - <http://democrats.assembly.ca.gov/members/a13/>

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4) New Jersey Decision Has Extra Significance to Two Freedom to Marry Staffers  
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Senior Web Producer Heather Jensen and her partner Amy Quinn are two of the thousands of gay and lesbian New Jerseyans eagerly anticipating the legislature's response to the Court's decision that may find that same-sex couples have a constitutional right to marry in the state.

"We talk about getting married sometimes," she says of her relationship with her partner of 3 1/2 years. "Early in our relationship our town briefly issued marriage licenses to gay and lesbian couples. At the time we were excited about the prospect but nervous about the actuality. Just because you can doesn't mean you should, you know? Of course, 2 1/2 years later we sometimes think 'Aw, we should've done it then!' But when marriage equality comes to New Jersey, we'll get hitched. We don't really want to domestic partnershipicize. We want the real thing."

Freedom to Marry Deputy Director Charles Ignacio and his partner John Catania have been together for almost 13 years. They are a very performing/visual arts-oriented family. The couple share a background in television and documentary production, so they're most likely found creating something in their spare time, whether it's their latest documentary, "The Lady in Question is Charles Busch" (now on DVD), or helping to start the first LGBT film festival in Jersey City, Chillfest, now in its second year.

Many committed same-sex couples share the same responsibilities as married couples. However, without the freedom to marry, they do not receive the same recognition or protections for their families as married couples. Says Charles, "If I had come to this country like my parents who came to the U.S. on temporary student visas, and then met John and continued in a long-term committed relationship like we are in now, I would still be forced to return to the Philippines once my visa expired because we would be denied the right to obtain a marriage license, despite the fact that we had dedicated our lives together. When my parents came to this country, interracial marriage was still illegal in most states. Here in New Jersey we're now working to remove the barriers to marriage that stand between me, a second-generation Filipino-American, and my partner."

He continues, "New Jersey's decision to give equal rights and responsibilities to my relationship with John makes clear that the love we share with each other is no less than that of non-gay couples. If the New Jersey legislature votes to call those rights marriage, then we would no longer be second class citizens. John and I can rest easier now that the last barriers to marriage are being removed so that we can not only love and care for ourselves into the future, but we will be treated like any other married couple under the law here in New Jersey."

LINKS:

* Heather Jensen - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/document.asp?id=1022>

* Asbury Park - http://www.gaypasg.org/GayPASG/PressClippings/2004/March%202004/asbury_park_performs_n.htm

* Charles Ignacio - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/document.asp?id=1387>

* "The Lady in Question is Charles Busch" - <http://www.theladyinquestion.com/>

* Chillfest -

http://chillfest.bside.com/?_view=_films&tabArg=%20&_action=&_template=chillfest&

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5) Volunteer Spotlight

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Freedom to Marry thanks recent volunteers Tim McMahon, Jennifer Lombardo, Jack Merlis, and Sherry Pizar for their help with our website and office administration. You complete us!

If YOU would like to get engaged in the movement for marriage equality by volunteering at Freedom to Marry, let us know! We could always use an extra hand or twelve. Email us at info@freedomtomarry.org.

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5) BlueJersey Launches Think Equal

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Jeff Gardner, a Hawthorne attorney and a BlueJersey.com blogger, said the ad targets people who have not given marriage equality much thought by highlighting the practical differences between the designations of civil union and marriage.

"The difference is in the level of acceptance that comes with the term 'marriage,'" he said. "Marriage is the only currency of commitment that the world, the nation and the state of New Jersey understands and accepts."

Link:

Think Equal ad - <http://www.bluejersey.com/thinkequal/index.html>

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QUOTE:

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"You don't change the world by whispering."

-- NY Governor-elect Eliot Spitzer, one of the two pro-marriage governors elected in November as quoted in the New York Times.

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OTHER POINTS OF INTEREST:

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Most visited pages last week:

- Thinking Anew - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/document.asp?id=4804>
- All Together Now: A Blueprint for the Movement - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/document.asp?id=1002>
- Sharing Our Stories - <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/document.asp?id=4717>

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