



PRESS ADVISORY - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

From Sea to Shining Sea, We Continue to See Support Building for Marriage Equality...

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Almost 20 years ago, the Hawaii State Supreme Court indicated same-sex couples might have the right to marry under their state constitution. In response, the U.S. Congress passed and President Clinton signed the so-called Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) that not only created an exemption to the Constitution's Full Faith and Credit Clause by saying that other states wouldn't have to recognize marriages for same-sex couples (Section 2), but also defined marriage as between a man and a woman for the purposes of federal recognition (Section 3). This week, in two separate challenges, one by the Massachusetts Attorney General and the other by Gays & Lesbian Advocates and Defenders (GLAD), a U.S. District Judge ruled that DOMA – specifically Section 3 - violates the equal protection clause of the U.S. Constitution.

"Yesterday's decision by the U.S. District Court in Massachusetts has confirmed there is nothing but unfounded and irrational bias and prejudice propping up the federal DOMA," said Molly McKay, Marriage Equality USA (MEUSA) Media Director. "We are thrilled and thankful for the Massachusetts couples and their GLAD attorneys, along with the Massachusetts Attorney General who brought this narrow, but important constitutional challenge. We hope that the federal court on the west coast will echo this courageous ruling and strike down California's Proposition 8 because it also is based solely on unfounded and irrational prejudice. In fact, we believe this is the first of many federal court rulings, coupled with anticipated movement on federal legislation, that will slowly dismantle the system of laws preventing same-sex couples access to the same rights and protections afforded all other people."

The federal challenge to California's Proposition 8 asserts there is no good reason to carve out an exemption to the state's equal protection clause denying same-sex couples the fundamental right to marry. And if there is no good reason to deny same-sex couples the fundamental right to marry and for the federal government to disregard these marriages, these decisions provide us great hope for marriage equality in the future.

"We know that as we move through the courts, we have to continue to build support with the court of public opinion," said Pamela Brown, MEUSA Policy Director. "Evidence presented in the federal challenge to Proposition 8 showed that no other group in American society has been targeted more by the ballot measures than gays and lesbians. And just this week, as Governor Lingle vetoed a civil union law in Hawaii, she advocated putting the rights of gays and lesbians up for a popular vote. But voters should decide issues like whether to increase taxes, not whether to deny a minority group fundamental rights."

"When the Judge Walker rules on the challenge to Proposition 8, we need to exercise our freedom of speech and share our stories in support of marriage equality," said Brown. "MEUSA is working with local organizations across the state to host community gatherings on the Day of Decision (<http://equalityevents.ning.com/events/event/listUpcoming>). So take part in this civil rights movement of our lifetime and join or start up a rally in your local community. By sharing your stories today, we can ensure marriage equality tomorrow... And as the sole defense witness stated 'we will become more American the day that same-sex couples have the right to marry.'"

Founded in 1998, Marriage Equality USA is a national grassroots organization whose mission is to secure legally recognized civil marriage equality for all, at the federal and state level, without regard to gender identity or sexual orientation. For more information go to www.marriageequality.org.
