

Take Action!

There are things you can do right now to advance the cause of equal rights and marriage.

- **Keep yourself and others informed** about recent developments in marriage equality by going to www.aclu-wa.org. It is often useful to utilize personal stories of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender couples when convincing others of the need for equal marriage rights.
- **Write a letter to the editor** of your local newspaper saying why you support legal marriages for same-sex couples and why a constitutional amendment against marriage equality is a bad idea.
- **Speak up** the next time you hear someone say marriage is only meant for heterosexual couples. If you hear this on a radio program, call in. If you hear it on TV, call or send an e-mail. If it comes up in conversation, state your views clearly and forcefully.
- **Host a house party** at which you can educate friends and family about marriage equality and raise funds for groups working on the cause. Invite a diverse group. Promote discussion and answer questions. Encourage them to write letters to Congress and to state

government officials about the issue. To organize an ACLU house party, contact field@aclu-wa.org.

- **Meet with clergy and other opinion leaders** in your community and ask them to join you in speaking out in support of marriage equality and against the Federal Marriage Amendment.
- **Join our e-mail activist network at www.aclu-wa.org** and stay informed about legislative developments on marriage equality.
- **Make a financial contribution** to support the ACLU of Washington.

Our Work in the Courts and the Community

- Nationwide, the ACLU has filed lawsuits challenging bans on marriage by same-sex couples in Oregon, California, New York, and Maryland.
- In Washington, the ACLU is pursuing a suit on behalf of 11 same-sex couples seeking to establish equal marriage rights statewide.
- The ACLU is a leading member of Equal Rights Washington, a statewide coalition of sexual minority organizations and allies.
- The ACLU has helped organize town hall meetings on equal marriage rights in communities across the state, including Olympia, Port Townsend, Seattle, Spokane, Tacoma, and Yakima.
- ACLU representatives speak out frequently on the need for marriage equality in the mass media and in public forums have educated students about the issue in school classrooms.
- The ACLU has designed and distributed educational materials on marriage equality to thousands of people across Washington. Information is available on the ACLU of Washington website at www.aclu-wa.org.

Why Marriage Equality Matters



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Why should same-sex couples have the right to marry?

The right to get married is a fundamental right. As a fundamental right, it should be equally available to all citizens. The government should not deny two people the right to legal marriage just because they are of the same sex. That is discrimination and is contrary to American values of fair and equal treatment for all. Just like heterosexuals, many lesbians and gays grow up dreaming of meeting a partner and making a lifelong commitment to another person. They should not be denied pursuit of this portion of the American dream simply because they have a same-sex partner.

Aren't civil unions for same-sex couples good enough?

Unequal treatment is not acceptable. Civil unions do not provide the same rights, benefits, and obligations as civil marriage. There are over 1,000 federal rights and more than 350 rights and obligations in our state that protect married couples and their families, including:

- Social Security survivor and pension benefits
- Hospital visitation rights
- Medical decision-making rights
- Inheritance rights
- Family leave under the federal Family Medical Leave Act
- End-of-life decisions

Marriage:	Civil Unions:
<p>States grant marriage licenses to couples.</p> <p>Couples have legal protections, rights, and responsibilities under state and federal law.</p> <p>Couples are recognized as being married by the federal government and all state governments.</p>	<p>States would grant civil union licenses to same-sex couples but marriage licenses to opposite-sex couples.</p> <p>Couples receive legal protections, rights, and responsibilities under state law which are effective only when located in the state.</p> <p>Civil unions are not recognized by other states or federal government.</p>

While civil unions and domestic partnerships provide some concrete benefits for same-sex couples, they fall far short of the benefits provided under marriage laws. And if government were to make civil unions entirely equal, why devalue the relationship by refusing to call it marriage?

How will granting marriage rights to same-sex couples affect families?

It will provide security and stability to families. According to the 2000 Census, there are more than a million children being raised by same-sex couples in the

United States. These children are negatively impacted by discriminatory laws. They are needlessly deprived of the legal protections that most families take for granted. Marriage equality is a pro-family ideal.

What about people who oppose granting marriage equality because of their religious beliefs?

Civil marriage involves a legal contract between two people. Equal access to legal marriage does not affect the right of religious institutions to decide whom they will marry. No church or religious organization will be required to perform a marriage ceremony for a same-sex couple, nor will anyone have to change their religious beliefs.

Hasn't the right to marry historically been limited to opposite-sex couples? Isn't this an important part of our cultural tradition?

Marriage equality arises from America's tradition of ending discriminatory treatment and erasing inequities of the past. The fact that laws have barred same-sex couples from marriage in the past does not mean it is right to continue doing so. The same argument – *"This is tradition. This is the way it has always been ..."* – was also used to support our now-discarded ban on marriage by interracial couples. American history is filled with examples of the enactment of new laws that extend legal rights to people previously treated unequally.