

The past few weeks have seen the unprecedented emergence of a movement by gay and lesbian couples demanding marriage equality. Beginning in San Francisco, spreading to New Mexico, Portland, and even the unlikely hamlets of New Paltz, NY and Asbury Park, NJ, there is no question that the marriage equality movement has taken on a life of its own. At Immigration Equality, we

**WE WRITE TO YOU TO CALL
FOR YOUR SUPPORT TO DEMAND
IMMIGRATION EQUALITY NOW!**

feel privileged to be a part of the LGBT rights movement during this historic time.

It is very fitting that at this historic juncture in the gay and lesbian rights movement, we are changing our name to Immigration Equality. In many ways, we have outgrown our old name, the Lesbian and Gay Immigration Rights Task Force, as we have broadened our work on behalf of bisexual, transgender, and HIV-positive immigrants. The name change also reflects our growth from a small, volunteer-run task force, to our emergence as the national leader on LGBT and HIV immigration rights issues. The new name also succinctly states our mission—to demand immigration equality for all, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or HIV status.

The unfortunate reality is that in spite of the tremendous gains of the marriage movement at the local levels, because immigration law is entirely federal and because the federal Defense of Marriage Act ("DOMA") defines marriage as only the union between a man and a woman, under current law, none of these historic marriages will be immediately recognized for immigration purposes. In fact, for many foreign nationals, marriage to a U.S. citizen or resident could lead to future visa denials because that permanent commitment evidences an intent to remain in the U.S. It is therefore essential that all foreign nationals consult with a qualified immigration attorney, or call our office before getting married.

As the national debate begins over the 1,100 plus rights which marriage affords, there can be no more essential right than the right to be with one's chosen partner. At the same time, as Congress debates a Constitutional amendment which would define marriage as only between one man and one woman, it does not seem likely that locally recognized marriages will gain federal recognition in the near future.

Immigration Equality adamantly opposes the Federal Marriage Amendment (FMA) which has been introduced in Congress. If passed, an FMA could make it impossible for same-sex binational couples to ever win immigration rights in the United States.

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The version of the amendment currently being considered in Congress would not only alter the U.S. Constitution to define marriage as only one between one man and one woman, it would also deny same sex couples "the legal incidents" of marriage. This short phrase could lead to rulings by federal and state courts striking down locally recognized marriages, civil unions, and domestic partnerships.

Most importantly for immigrants, it could be interpreted to write current immigration discrimination into the United States Constitution forever, eliminating the possibility that the Permanent Partners Immigration Act (PPIA) or other legislation will recognize same-sex couples in the future.

**WE URGE YOU TO CONTACT YOUR
CONGRESSIONAL REPRESENTATIVES
TO LET THEM KNOW THAT YOU
STRONGLY OPPOSE FMA.**

With the debate over same sex marriage propelling the issue of gay and lesbian couples onto the national stage as never before, we believe this is the ideal moment to demand legal recognition of binational couples. Since its introduction in Congress in 2000 (H.R. 832), the Permanent Partners Immigration Act (PPIA) has slowly but surely been gaining bipartisan support. It was introduced in the Senate for the first time last summer (S. 1510.) Politicians throughout the country are claiming that

they are not yet ready to change the definition of marriage, but they do support equal rights for lesbians and gay men. The time has never been better to ask your Congressperson or Senator to cosponsor the PPIA.

Understandably, many people who have been swept along in the growing tide of marriage equality have taken the position that anything short of full marriage rights is an unacceptable compromise. Of course we would like nothing better than to see full recognition of same sex marriages by every state, and, most importantly, by the federal government. But we are not asking anyone to choose between support for marriage and support for the PPIA. Rather we see the two as alternate roads to the same destination - immigration equality for binational couples - and call upon you to take advantage of this historic opportunity to shorten the road to the PPIA.

Immigration Equality is a member-driven organization. Everybody can play a role in this important movement. For some people, this means committing time to educate others about the PPIA and the FMA, for others this means writing a check to help others spread the word. Whatever way you can fit into this movement, now is the time to take action. Demand Immigration Equality now!

Action Alert

WHAT CAN YOU DO:

- Write to your Representative and/or Senator and urge them to oppose the Federal Marriage Amendment (FMA). Tell them enshrining discrimination into our constitution is wrong.
- Find out if your Senator/Representative has signed on as a Permanent Partners Immigration Act (PPIA) cosponsor: visit <http://thomas.loc.gov> now.
- Don't know who your Representative/Senators are- visit www.house.gov and www.senate.gov (make sure you have your zip code).
- If your Representative or Senator is not a cosponsor, fax or email them to ask for their support. If they are a cosponsor, write them a thank you letter.

**PLEASE DETACH THE
LETTERS BELOW AND
SEND TO YOUR
SENATORS/REPRESENTATIVE**

**DEMAND IMMIGRATION
EQUALITY, TODAY.**

RE: PERMANENT PARTNERS IMMIGRATION ACT

As your constituent, I write to you today to request your support in a matter of importance to my family and me. As you know, U.S. immigration laws are based on the principle of family unification. Currently, nearly 65% of all "green cards," are issued to family members of U.S. citizens and permanent residents. However, same-sex partners are not considered qualifying family members. The Permanent Partner Immigration Act (PPIA, S.1510 or H.R. 832) seeks to remedy this injustice and I urge you to cosponsor this important legislation.

The inability of U.S. citizens and permanent residents in committed same-sex relationships to sponsor their partners for immigration benefits forces many Americans to choose between the country and the individual they love. Under the PPIA, same-sex binational couples would have to meet strict requirements to demonstrate that they are in a committed relationship. These requirements include proof of relationship, supportive affidavits and evidence of financial interdependence.

As your constituent, I am deeply affected by the non-recognition of my family for immigration purposes and ask you to cosponsor the PPIA.

Thank you.

RE: FEDERAL MARRIAGE AMENDMENT

As your constituent, I write to you today to request your support in a matter of importance to my family and me. I urge you to oppose the Federal Marriage Amendment (FMA) which would discriminate against me by defining marriage as only between one man and one woman and by banning federal recognition of same-sex marriages and the legal incidents thereof.

This amendment, however, would do much more than define marriage. Leading legal scholars agree that the amendment could forever invalidate civil unions or other legal protections for same-sex couples—such as the right to visit a partner in the hospital or to receive partner immigration benefits.

Marriage rights and responsibilities are essential components to the family structure. Families headed by same-sex couples, deserve the right to protect the safety and security of their families and children. The FMA denies same-sex families fundamental rights by enshrining discrimination into our country's most sacred document. In doing so, this amendment also seeks to limit states' power to regulate and define marriage.

Please oppose any attempt to build discrimination into the very document that should protect everyone and please oppose any other legislation designed to prohibit civil, secular recognition of same-sex relationships. I look forward to hearing from you on this extremely important issue.

Thank you.