

VALUE ALL FAMILIES COALITION

FAMILIES AND LEGISLATORS URGE REJECTION OF PROPOSED ANTI-FAMILY AMENDMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 24, 2006

Contact: Stacey Sobel, 215-731-1447 x 11
Larry Frankel, 215-592-1513 x 118

Harrisburg. (PA) – Today the Values All Families Coalition, State Representative Steve Stetler from York, and State Representative James Roebuck from Philadelphia spoke against the proposed constitutional amendment on marriage. They explained why this proposed amendment should be called the Pennsylvania Anti-Family Amendment since it will hurt many families, children and the people of Pennsylvania. They were joined by families who would be adversely affected by the proposed amendment as well as other legislators who oppose the amendment.

“Nobody should be fooled by supporters of the proposed amendment who say they just want to protect marriage,” said Stacey Sobel, executive director of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Civil Rights, one of the spokespersons for the Value All Families Coalition. “The reality is this is an anti-family amendment. It will negatively impact many families and could take away some of the rights that protect them today. This is what would be accomplished by those who want to write discrimination into our state constitution.”

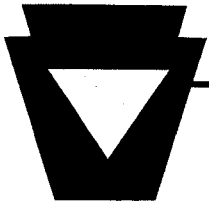
Carole Fryberger and her family from Lancaster County, Tony Rodriguez of Abington, Norval Copeland of Philadelphia and Roxanne Hitchcock of Oil City spoke about how the amendment would hurt their families and gay and lesbian Pennsylvanians.

The Rev. Dr. Russell H. Mueller of St. Michael Lutheran Church in Harrisburg discussed why people of faith should oppose the amendment.

Representative Stetler, speaking on behalf of his fellow legislators said, “It is disheartening to see this divisive attempt at restricting the legal rights of Pennsylvanians. A person’s sexual orientation, identity or expression should not determine what rights they are entitled to under our state constitution. Our constitution is intended to protect families, children and communities. It is not intended to discriminate against anyone for any reason.”

Attention to the proposed constitutional amendment has been heightened by the recent decision invalidating the Maryland ban on same-sex marriage. Responding to those who claim that decision shows why Pennsylvania needs a constitutional amendment, Larry Frankel, legislative director for the ACLU of Pennsylvania said, “A court decision from another state is no reason to create second-class citizens in Pennsylvania. Those who want to put discrimination into the Constitution would have been promoting this divisive idea no matter what the court in Maryland decided. Our elected officials should act to protect and nurture all of Pennsylvania’s families and not be persuaded by those special interests who think they own the right to say who is a family.”

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THE CENTER FOR LESBIAN AND GAY CIVIL RIGHTS

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CENTER OPPOSES ANTI-FAMILY CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

**Statement of Stacey L. Sobel, Executive Director
The Center for Lesbian and Gay Civil Rights**

January 24, 2006

Contact: Stacey Sobel, 215-731-1447 ext. 11

The Center for Lesbian and Gay Civil Rights opposes the proposed Pennsylvania constitutional amendment because it will hurt the Commonwealth's families, not protect them. At a time when there are so many families facing challenges in our state, such as health care, education and jobs, it is shameful that some of our legislators are wasting their time and our tax-payers' money to write discrimination into the state's constitution.

Frankly, I do not understand how this amendment protects marriage. It will not prevent one couple from getting divorced. It will not provide support to any couples struggling to find their way. It will not feed, cloth or education a family's child.

If this anti-family amendment is passed, it will harm Pennsylvania's families. This amendment does not simply ban same-sex marriage; it will also prohibit recognition of any relationship for any purpose for unmarried people. It will prevent partners from taking care of each other when they are ill. It will prevent some couples from receiving pension benefits if one of them dies. It will hurt the children of these families who might be denied the opportunity for health insurance.

I have listened to the people who support a constitutional amendment, yet I have not heard one example of how any married couple will lose their rights or be harmed. We already have a law prohibiting marriage between two people of the same-sex. This anti-family amendment is nothing more than an attempt to ensure that some of the Commonwealth's families will enjoy the protections of the law while others will not.

Today, the Value All Families Coalition stands before you. It is comprised of civil rights groups, children's advocates, and faith organizations, among others. This is not a gay and lesbian issue. It is not a democratic or republican issue. This is a family issue.

More than 7,000 petitions were delivered to legislators by Liberty PA yesterday and today. Every legislator in this state has received phone calls, emails and letters asking them to oppose this amendment. I call upon our elected officials to stand-up to those legislators who out of fear or political expediency are proposing this anti-family amendment. I ask them to say "no" to this amendment. I ask them to protect and value all of Pennsylvania's families.



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ACLU OF PENNSYLVANIA CRITICIZES PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT AS ANTI-FAMILY AND DISCRIMINATORY

**Statement of Larry Frankel, Legislative Director
ACLU of Pennsylvania
Tuesday, January 24, 2006**

**Contact: Larry Frankel
215-592-1513 ext. 118**

PHILADELPHIA – The American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania proudly joins with our allies and friends to announce our spirited opposition to the constitutional amendment that is being proposed here in Pennsylvania. We know that this amendment is not just about same-sex marriage. Rather we recognize it for what it is – a political and divisive attack on thousands of families, children and loving relationships. We call on the members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly to reject this unnecessary and discriminatory amendment.

One need only look at the language of the proposed amendment to understand that this is not just a question of banning same-sex marriage. No, this amendment would bar the legal recognition of any kind of intimate relationship that is not a heterosexual marriage. This means no recognition for civil unions, domestic partnerships, or life partnerships. This non-recognition would extend to opposite sex couples as well as same-sex couples.

This amendment could have a substantial negative impact on the children and other family members who live with such couples. Access to health insurance could be impaired. Family or medical leave could be denied. Domestic violence victims could be denied relief, just like in Ohio.

Proponents of this amendment are saying that Pennsylvania must act to amend its constitution because a judge in Maryland, last week, decided that the Maryland law banning same sex marriage was sex discrimination and violated the Maryland Constitution's equal rights provisions.

It is always troubling to see any legislature react to any court decision by hastily passing a constitutional amendment. It would be especially troubling to see this legislature do that in response to a trial court decision from another state.

A court decision from another state is no reason to create second-class citizens in Pennsylvania. Those who want to put discrimination into the Constitution would have been promoting this divisive idea no matter what the court in Maryland decided. Our elected officials should act to protect and nurture all of Pennsylvania's families and not be persuaded by those special interests who think they own the right to say who is a family.

STOP THE ANTI-FAMILY AMENDMENT!

Statement of:

Frank P. Cervone, Esq.

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The Support Center for Child Advocates urges Pennsylvania legislators to **oppose** the proposed amendment to the Pennsylvania Constitution being introduced by Representatives Boyd and Metcalfe. While this initiative is being touted as “pro-family” and “pro-child,” the Boyd-Metcalfe Amendment does more to hurt children and potential families.

Even though the Boyd-Metcalfe Amendment is being promoted as a simple gay marriage ban, courts are using similar state constitutional amendments to make sweeping judgments on all types of people and family structures. For example, in Ohio and Michigan, constitutional amendments that resemble what is being proposed for Pennsylvania have become the basis for denying relief to unmarried victims of domestic abuse or disallowing health benefits for domestic partners.

Gay men and lesbians are becoming parents in growing numbers and they are critically important resources for the child-serving community. The Boyd-Metcalfe Amendment would diminish the quality of family life for many of these families by stripping them of the necessary legal protections and economic benefits they need to survive and thrive. Denying gay and lesbian couples the right to marry or have their relationships recognized under the law will adversely impact their legal rights in pension, health insurance, hospital visitations, and medical decision making. This will not only have a negative impact on the couple, but in turn will make it more difficult for their children.

We can all agree that many Americans place a strong value on family. But, we should not narrowly define what is a family. Rather, Pennsylvania law should encourage those who want to serve as parents and to take on the legal responsibilities of parenthood and make it easier for them to be good parents.

The Boyd-Metcalfe Amendment can only result in fewer good homes for our children, at a time when child-serving professionals already struggle to find caring homes and families. This divisive amendment will undoubtedly limit the state's ability to provide permanency for children in the child welfare system. It will be used to overrule adoption agencies that are willing to accept qualified adults as parents. It will prevent waiting children from moving into permanent families.

The mission of the Support Center for Child Advocates is to protect and provide permanency for all children. As we believe is evident, the Boyd-Metcalfe Amendment is anti-children, anti-family, discriminatory and bad for Pennsylvania's future. Please continue to value all of Pennsylvania's children and families, and vote against this amendment.

The role of government is to protect, but I see nothing in this amendment that will in fact protect or stabilize our state or its citizens. What I do see is an amendment rooted in the demonization of one group of citizens, an attitude that is cancerous and abhorrent to everything I believe as a Christian.

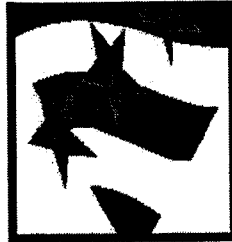
A great many of the rationalizations for the amendment are rooted in fears, fears that are totally unjustified or inaccurate. It is ludicrous, for example, to say that without this amendment, religious denominations will be forced to bless or marry same-sex couples (as supporters of this amendment have threatened). It is NOT going to happen. As a Christian I refuse to be driven by fear. If we allow fear to drive us we respond with the reptilian part of our brain rather than with the good sense that God has given us.

The role of government is not to define marriage. "Marriage" is a title already given by society to relationships that are highly diverse.

I am deeply concerned that the breadth of the amendment prohibits any legal status that is substantially equivalent to marriage. I am driven by what I believe are God's expectation that I "do justice, have mercy and love God." I see nothing just or merciful about refusing the protection of legal status to those who are trying to establish a relationship that provides stability to their lives and for society.

What we need is not an amendment. We need the people who are putting so much energy into this amendment to energetically and constructively work to improve family relationships amongst their own associations in order that the sort of nurture and stability can be developed there as I find in the homes of the same sex couples I know. Against many forces, these same-sex couples provide exemplary nurture and stability; they have lives, relationships and families from which many of their opponents could take lessons.

*The Rev Dr Russell H Mueller, Pastor
St Michael Evangelical Lutheran Church, Harrisburg, PA
January 24, 2006*



STONEWALL

PA Stonewall Democrats urge: Drop 'marriage amendment' distraction and actually help families

For immediate release / Jan. 24, 2006 -- Leaders of Pennsylvania's Stonewall Democrats chapters today urged legislators to stand up for all families by refusing to enlist in the latest conservative culture-war effort, a so-called "marriage protection amendment" to the state constitution:

"Pennsylvania families face real problems. One in 12 children in Pennsylvania have no health insurance. One in three families live in poverty or have an income that barely sustains them. This amendment would do nothing to solve these real, difficult problems. Instead, it scapegoats law-abiding families, targets gays, lesbians and other unmarried citizens, and distracts the legislature from honestly addressing the problems facing Pennsylvania families, such as last week's announcement that 345 Sony workers in western Pennsylvania will lose their jobs."

More than 7,000 letters opposing the amendment are being delivered to legislators this week. The letters are from constituents in each of the 203 state House districts and were collected by Liberty PA, a statewide LGBT political action committee working to advance civil rights, to elect progressive Democratic candidates, and to build a lasting network of energized LGBT and allied voters across Pennsylvania.

The Pittsburgh and Harrisburg chapters of the Stonewall Democrats have created online resource pages on the proposed amendment:

Steel City (Pittsburgh) - <http://www.steel-city.org/marriageindex.php>

Includes a census-based map showing where same-sex families live in Pennsylvania, and a link to a report entitled "Truth or Consequences: The Effects of Constitutional Amendments on Marriage in Ohio, Michigan, Missouri and Utah."

Capital Region (Harrisburg) - <http://www.capitalstonewall.org/amendnew.html>

Includes information on the fact that the divorce rate for Vermont's civil unions is 1 percent after five years.

Liberty PA's website is www.libertypa.org. The website for the Philadelphia-area chapter of the Stonewall Democrats is www.libertycity.org.

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LancasterOnline.com

Why gays could save marriage

By Gil Smart
Sunday News

Published: Jan 21, 2006 11:57 PM EST

LANCASTER COUNTY, PA - So I was saddened, but certainly not surprised, to read in this newspaper last weekend that the legislative jihad against gay marriage in Pennsylvania will be led by elected officials from Lancaster County.

That makes sense, I suppose, though I wouldn't have pegged Rep. Scott Boyd, chief sponsor of the bill to amend the Pennsylvania Constitution, as the type of guy to head up this particular parade. But I suppose that if you've been elected to office in Lancaster County, you need to remember which side of your bread gets the butter; if you're not an extremist, you need to play one on TV, or else you might be looking for a new line of work come the next election.

Our story last week was filled with all the usual rhetoric: Pennsylvania needs to head off "activist judges" at the pass lest they undercut the traditional family, blah blah blah. You've heard it all before; over the course of the next few months, you'll hear it all again.

Thing is, I understand why proponents of revising the state constitution are doing this. When you come right down to it, they're afraid, afraid of change, afraid that redefining what has been a cultural norm for thousands of years might harm not just marriage but society itself, in that marriage has been a fundamental building block of civil society.

I understand that apprehension, though I nevertheless believe it to be utterly misplaced.

For the assumption is that permitting gays access to the legal protections afforded married couples automatically undermines marriage as an institution.

The reality is that heterosexuals have already undermined the institution.

The culture of divorce and the all-too-frequent abandonment of parental responsibility has frayed the very bonds that made civil society possible. Marriage has been important because it has provided stability for both individuals and, ultimately, entire communities. Couples marry, buy or build

homes, have kids and necessarily take an interest in those kids' lives. This commitment to one another ultimately translates into a commitment to society as a whole; it makes our neighborhoods, our schools, better places to be. This is the key contribution of marriage as an institution; this is the real importance of marriage to society. And it has nothing to do with the sex of the participants.

Indeed, the sex of the participants has only been important in that men and women can have children, and gay couples couldn't, that is, until same-sex couples began adopting kids.

Are we to say that their commitment to such children, to their communities or schools, is somehow less valid or valuable than that of heterosexuals? And in a society where half of marriages end in divorce, where the number of kids born out of wedlock has skyrocketed, can we really afford to bar the door to those who wish to make the very commitment without which civil society might never have evolved?

Doing so does nothing to strengthen marriage as an institution, nor society as a whole.

You might argue that it weakens both.

Of course, the culture warriors aren't buying it. For in this debate, reason is relegated to the back seat while fear and dogmatism ride up front.

But what I want to know is this: How is banning gay marriage going to drive down the divorce rate? What is it going to do to ensure that wayward parents honor their obligations to their children?

Exactly how will this measure "protect marriage," or strengthen society?

Or is all of that secondary to punishing those uppity queers and keeping second-class citizens in their place?

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**PITTSBURGH
TRIBUNE-REVIEW**

A marriage- protection racket


By Dimitri Vassilaros
TRIBUNE-REVIEW
Monday, January 16, 2006

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Marriage is under attack. The hopes of a powerful lobby are resting on one branch of state government to do its dirty work so a controversial definition of marriage will be the official law of the land. In a few days, Pennsylvania will become the next battleground in the culture war.



Can anything protect marriage from this onslaught by social conservatives who want to deny homosexuals the right to marry?

State Rep. Scott W. Boyd, R-Lancaster, intends to introduce a bill in the General Assembly -- a bill with 88 co-sponsors and counting -- that will limit the inalienable right of marriage.

Mr. Boyd, married for 27 years with two children, said the wording in his proposed constitutional amendment likely will be:

"Only a marriage between one man and one woman shall be valid or recognized as a marriage in this commonwealth, and neither the commonwealth now nor any of its political subdivisions shall create or recognize a legal status identical or substantially equivalent to that of marriage for unmarried individuals."

Never mind that at least two sections in Article I of the Pennsylvania Constitution seem to suggest that the government should treat homosexual Pennsylvanians just like heterosexual ones:

Section 26: "Neither the Commonwealth nor any political subdivision thereof shall deny to any person the enjoyment of any civil right, nor discriminate against any person in the exercise of any civil right."

Many social conservatives like to think of themselves as originalists or strict constructionists regarding the state and federal constitutions -- that the words mean exactly what they say. What part of "any" do they not understand?

Section 28: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania because of the sex of the individual." What part of "not" do they not understand?

Social conservatives seem to be irony-challenged regarding the same-sex marriage issue.

Whenever a judge or legislative body in a state say that homosexuals have the same marriage rights as heterosexuals, *it promotes more marriage*. Denying gays and lesbians that right is anything *but* protecting marriage -- it's attacking it. The gays are the ones trying to protect it.

And one would have thought that social conservatives would be the last people on Earth who would want -- welcome actually -- government intervention into religion as well as acting like the Creator when enumerating inalienable rights.

The Pennsylvania for Marriage home page (www.pa4marriage.org) was created by several so-called pro-family groups that support the proposed amendment. The questions-and-answers page about what the amendment will do if it becomes part of the Constitution includes an answer that every citizen should find very chilling.

The amendment would prevent a court's "finding" a constitutional right to marriage. In other words, marriage is not a right but a privilege that government may bestow to those it favors.

Michael Geer, president of the Pennsylvania Family Institute, one of the organizations backing the Web site, said it could have been worded better.

But the wording is perfect for those wanting government to grant the privilege of marriage to some while denying others the unalienable rights endowed by their Creator.

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