

October 21, 2003
TESTIMONY OF MASSACHUSETTS CHAPTER OF NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS
IN SUPPORT OF H36677(CIVIL MARRIAGE) AND HOUSE 1149, SENATE 935 AND
SENATE 1045 (CIVIL UNIONS)

The Massachusetts Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) -- with over 8,200 members -- strongly supports House 3677 (Civil Marriage) and House 1149, Senate 935 and Senate 1045 (Civil Unions).

Ending the exclusion of same-sex couples from marriage will enhance and fortify the stability of same-sex relationships and will also promote the best interests of children of same-sex couples. Civil unions, while a big step in the right direction, do not further these important social objectives in the way that marriage does. And, equally important denying same-sex couples the right to marry is an infringement on their civil rights.

1. Enhancing the Stability of Relationships.

Scientific research demonstrates that lesbians and gay men have the same capacity to form stable, long-lasting and intimate relationships as heterosexuals. Moreover, studies demonstrate that the quality of same-sex relationships is comparable to that of opposite-sex relationships.

The denial of marriage to same-sex couples, however, disadvantages the relationships of same-sex couples in the same way that it would for heterosexual couples if they were denied marriage. Gay and lesbian couples all too often experience less social support for their relationships from family and society. The legal protections and obligations of civil marriage will support these committed relationships. Same-sex couples who are married will be more likely to receive the type of social support that is given by parents, grandparents, friends, and neighbors to married couples.

Moreover, the economic and social benefits of civil marriage will promote the health and well-being of gay men and lesbian women. Marriage is at the core of our health care, pension, and other social safety net systems. Indeed, married people are reportedly healthier, live longer, and experience less poverty than their non-married counterparts. Marriages between same-sex partners would provide those individuals, as well as society as a whole, with the same critical benefits and protections that are provided by opposite-sex marriages.

2. Promoting the Best Interests of Children of Lesbian Women and Gay Men.

NASW has examined the existing social science literature -- consisting of more than 50 peer-reviewed studies conducted over 25 years -- regarding the well-being and adjustment of children of lesbian and gay couples.

This research indisputably demonstrates that children of same-sex parents are as healthy, happy, and well-adjusted in every aspect of development as their peers. Not a single study has found children of lesbian and gay parents to be disadvantaged in any way. Indeed, the research shows that the critical factor for child well-being is not the gender of the parents, but the quality of parental nurturance.

As NASW has concluded in our official policy statement:

"The most striking research on lesbian mothers, gay fathers, and their children is the absence of pathological findings. The second most striking feature is how similar the groups of gay and lesbian parents and their children are to heterosexual parents and their children that were included in the studies." (See National Association of Social Workers, Policy Statement: Lesbians, Gay, and Bisexual Issues, in Social Work Speaks, 193, 194 (1997).)

The research on children of same-sex couples is remarkable in two important respects:

First, like NASW, every authoritative medical, psychological, and child welfare organization to address this subject has reached an identical conclusion. The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychological Association, the American Psychoanalytic Association, the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, and the American Psychiatric Association have all issued policies, based on scientific evidence, that conclude that: (1) Lesbian and gay parents are as fit, capable and successful as heterosexual parents; and (2) Children of lesbian and gays fare as well as children of heterosexuals on all measures of emotional health, social and psychological adjustment, and cognitive development.

Second, this consensus is based on a professionally accepted standard of research methodology; numerous independent studies, using different sample sizes and techniques have concluded that there are no differences between gay and lesbian parents and their children as compared to their heterosexual counterparts.

Opponents of same-sex marriage sometimes claim that children of lesbians and gays are more likely to be lesbian or gay themselves. This Committee should not countenance such an unsupported myth. There is no scientific basis to conclude that same-sex parents somehow cause children who do not otherwise feel same-sex attraction to have such feelings. Moreover, this state has sought to eradicate the prejudice that being lesbian or gay is somehow objectionable. The mental health profession long ago jettisoned the notion that being gay or lesbian implies impairment or inferiority.

Marriage will benefit children of same-sex couples and enhance the stability of their families. Children of lesbians and gays need and deserve the same permanence and security in

parental relationships as children of opposite-sex parents. Marriage will fortify committed relationships between parents and thereby enhance the stable care-taking, permanence, and security that come from having two available parents.

Finally, the exclusion of same-sex couples from marriage suggest to the children raised in those families that their parents' relationship is less acceptable than or inferior to that of heterosexuals. Allowing same-sex couples the choice to marry would reduce the prejudice and discrimination faced by their children.

The Massachusetts Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers strongly endorses H 3677, H 1045, H 1149, and S 935.

Submitted by:

Carol Brill, Ph.D., ACSW, LICSW,
Executive Director
Brill@naswma.org