



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas K. Duane

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THOMAS K. DUANE June 1, 2009



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Senator Thomas K. Duane Calls on Senators to Pass Marriage Equality, End Discrimination in New York; Same-Sex Couples, Legislators Stand Witness to Inequality

Albany, NY -- Today Senator Thomas K. Duane (D-WFP Manhattan), the prime sponsor of marriage equality legislation in the State Senate, was joined by same-sex couples from across New York State in Albany to show their love and commitment to each other in light of the fact that New York denies them the basic legal right of marriage. Senator Duane was joined at the event by his partner of nearly 17 years, Louis Webre.

“We must and we will pass marriage equality,” said Senator Duane. “I invited these couples to come here today and stand witness before my Senate colleagues, and indeed all New Yorkers, to the experience of being denied equal treatment under the law.”

Senator Duane continued, “These are regular people with regular problems. They have been denied their civil rights. The Senate can make their lives easier. These are difficult times, but in good times and in bad, they deserve to have the same right to marriage as any other loving couple. These people, these couples, these families: they add so much to our state. Denying them the right to marry is wrong; legally and morally. This must change and it will change this year.”

Legislators from the Assembly, (who voted in favor of marriage equality in May by a vote of 89 to 52), and Senators supportive of the legislation joined Senator Duane at the gathering. Senator Duane highlighted the stories of several same-sex couples in New York State who have endured unnecessary hardships because they were not allowed to marry.

Senator Duane ended by stating, “Same-sex couples can tell countless stories of discrimination and inequality in this state. Couples are forced to choose between staying in New York, and being treated like second class citizens, or getting married in another jurisdiction and trying to determine which spousal rights New York may or may not recognize. It is hard to believe that in 2009 New York sanctions this form of discrimination. I find it hard to believe that any of my Senate colleagues could look these couples in the eye and explain to them why their love does not deserve marriage.”

In 2001, Senator Duane was the first New York State legislator to introduce a same-sex marriage bill. The current bill, S.4401, is pending in the Senate Judiciary Committee. There are thirteen Session days left in this year’s Legislative Calendar.

Here are some of the stories of New York same-sex couples:

Elizabeth Relyea and Joanne Trinkle of Scotia:

“Our home is here, our jobs are here, our family is here, our friends are here. We have not gone to another state to be legally married. We have committed that we will be legally married when New York State recognizes our relationship and affords us the opportunity to be married where we pay taxes. We want the money we spend on a marriage celebration to be spent in New York State and not a neighboring state.”

“We want to be married so that we can benefit from the peace of mind that comes with hundreds of rights that are currently withheld from us. We want to be married so that we can safeguard each other for the future and protect all that we have worked hard to build together in these 9 years. We want civil marriage to pass in New York State so that we can finally have the same rights and protections marriage brings to our parents, siblings, cousins, neighbor, co-workers and straight friends.”

Jay Blotcher and Brook Garrett of High Falls:

“Last August, two weeks after our marriage in California, Brook needed emergency brain surgery. I had to make a medical decision on the spot that would save his life. But we live in a state that does not have marriage equality. Therefore, Benedictine Hospital in Kingston, NY -- a Catholic hospital -- could have easily denied my right to approve surgery. There was no law to compel them otherwise. Thankfully, they honored our marriage and Brook had the surgery that saved his life and stands next to me today. But what of other couples in this state facing the same crises?”

Maresa Patterson and Julia Cohen of Brookline, Massachusetts:

“Both Julia and I went to college and began working as teachers in NYC. We were both in New York for five years, and I LOVED the city. We would have stayed, had we been able to a) marry in NY and b) be recognized as a married couple. As it happened, we were married on Martha's Vineyard last summer after moving to Brookline, MA.”

Karen Ruocco and Heather Deane of New York City:

“My partner and I are very fortunate that our relationship is supported by our families and friends. We were lucky to fall in love and know that we wanted to build a life together, and we ask only for the same opportunities and protections afforded any other married couple under the law. “

“We pay our bills, we pay our taxes, we work, we make time for each other, for friends, for family. It is vital that our relationship be seen as equal in the eyes of the law. To those who would say our marriage diminishes theirs, we say that the more participants subscribe to an institution, the stronger it becomes.”

Rev. Dr. Ted Hayes of Kingston:

“The love of my life has died at the age of 95. You probably didn't know him. Truly, truly that was your loss!”

“We were life partners for decades and there is a great void in my life because he is gone. He never could grasp how our being married would have harmed another's marriage in the slightest, especially since many of those who condemned us experienced three or more spouses during the time we were a loving, monogamous couple. And so we were separated without our loving relationship ever having been recognized legally as a family.”

“A democracy is defined as the “practice or principles of social equality.” That he, who loved, was loyal to and served his country -- allegedly a democracy -- was not granted equality during his lifetime, is an indictment against that claim. I will never forgive my country for that!”

Jeffrey Friedman and Andrew Zwerin of Rockville Center:

“New York State granted us the right to adopt our son, Joshua, but yet they do not recognize us as a family in any capacity. Our son should be afforded the same rights and protections that other children receive through their parent's marriage and he should feel that his family is equal to those of his classmates. While we appreciate the fact that New York State now recognizes same sex marriages from other states, including ours in California, the fact that this was accomplished via executive order leaves us concerned that it could easily be undone by the next administration.”

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