



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas K. Duane

## Statement of NYS Senator Thomas K. Duane on the New York State Senate Passing Historic Marriage Equality Legislation

THOMAS K. DUANE June 24, 2011

There are rare moments when the historical significance of an action speaks for itself and words can't capture the magnitude. This is one such moment.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) New Yorkers will no longer be denied the right to marry the ones they love. For the first time in New York's rich history they will be granted equal protection under the law.

I want to commend the incredible leadership and passion of Governor Andrew Cuomo who made good on his promise to make Marriage Equality the law in New York State. I also want to thank my colleagues in the State Senate on both sides of the aisle, and in the Assembly, who took a courageous stand when it would have been far easier for them to turn away from what I know for many was a difficult issue. Most importantly, I applaud the LGBT community -- and our straight allies -- for their tireless work and for never giving up. Their stories of life, love and commitment made an indelible mark on all New Yorkers.

I must also thank my family and my life companion Louis Webre.

Today's actions eliminated one of the last remaining hurdles to full LGBT Equality in New

York State. I became the Senate's first openly gay and HIV positive member in 1999, and I remain the only one. At the time I was told achieving any form of LGBT equality in the Senate was impossible.

History proved otherwise.

In 1999, New York enacted comprehensive hate crime legislation which sent a powerful message that violence and hate against LGBT New Yorkers will not be tolerated. In 2002, the Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act (SONDA) insured that no one could be denied employment, housing, credit, education and public accommodations simply because of their real or perceived sexual orientation. And just last year we passed the Dignity for All Students Act which will combat the senseless bullying and harassment of our LGBT youth in the classroom. All with bipartisan support. After today, passage of GENDA will be our state's next challenge and soon our next victory.

It is true that today holds enormous historical significance and it must be proudly celebrated. The paradoxical truth is that what already exists and will not change, but for true legal recognition, is the commitment and love that is already the reality in so many of New York's families.