

Declaration of Religious Support

MASSACHUSETTS DECLARATION OF RELIGIOUS SUPPORT FOR THE FREEDOM OF SAME-GENDER COUPLES TO MARRY

The most fundamental human right, after the necessities of food, clothing and shelter, is the right to affection and the supportive love of other human beings. We become most fully human when we love another person. We can grow in our capacity to be human -- to be loving -- in a family unit. This right to love and to form a family is so fundamental that our Constitution takes it for granted in its dedication to "secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity"; our Declaration of Independence likewise affirms the essential right of human beings to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Throughout history, tyrants have known that by denying the right of oppressed peoples to form and nurture families, they can kill the spirit of those peoples. From the shameful history of slavery in America, the injustice of forbidding people to marry is evident as a denial of basic human rights. The American laws forbidding interracial marriage, now struck down, were clearly discriminatory. Denial of the status of marriage, to those who would freely accept its responsibilities, creates legal and economic inequities in addition to its social injustice. We feel called to protest and oppose this type of injustice.

As religious people, clergy, and leaders, we are mandated to stand for justice in our common civic life. We oppose appeals to sacred texts and religious traditions for the purpose of denying legal equity to same-gender couples. As concerned citizens, we affirm the liberty of adults of the same gender to love and marry. We insist that no one, especially the state, may either coerce people into marriage, or bar two consenting adults of the same gender from forming the family unit that lets them be more fully loving, thus more fully human. We respect the fact that debate and discussion continue in many of our religious communities as to the theological and liturgical issues involved. However, we draw on our many faith traditions to arrive at a common conviction: we are resolved that the State should not interfere with same-gender couples who choose to marry and share fully and equally in the rights, responsibilities, and commitments of civil marriage.

We affirm the right to freedom of conscience in this matter: we recognize that the state may not require religious groups to officiate at, or bless, same-gender marriages. By the same token, a denial of civil recognition dishonors the religious convictions of those communities and clergy who do officiate at, and bless, same-gender marriages; the state may not favor the convictions of one religious group over another to deny individuals their fundamental right to marry and have those marriages recognized by civil law.

As faith leaders, we commit ourselves to public action, visibility, education, and mutual support in the service of the right and freedom to marry.

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**Religious Coalition for
the Freedom to Marry**