

BJ's Commitment to Marriage Equality

On May 30, 2006 Jewish and Christian leaders from more than 30 congregations throughout the city, joined together at Congregation B'nai Jeshurun to call for the legal recognition of marriage rights for same-sex couples. More than 500 people attended the event which was covered by all the major local news outlets.

The event was organized by B'nai Jeshurun's Marriage Equality Hevra in partnership with Empire State Pride Agenda.

The Marriage Equality Hevra supports the right of gay and lesbian couples to marry because we believe that all human beings are created b'tselem elohim (in the divine image). As such, the law *must* be inclusive of every person and must be applied equally. Discrimination directed toward any individual or group diminishes our humanity.

The Marriage Equality Hevra Mission:

- To work as a Jewish congregation to strengthen the faith-based movement for marriage equality;
- To advocate for the enactment of New York State legislation that affirms the right of same-sex couples to have the same freedom to marry as other couples;
- To ensure that our federal, state, and local governments fully respect the legal marriages of same-sex couples;
- And to oppose all attempts to limit access to marriages for same-sex couples, including constitutional amendments and the "Defense of Marriage Act."

To learn more about
Congregation B'nai Jeshurun and
the Marriage Equality Hevra, contact:

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Help End New York's Marriage Discrimination Against Same-Sex Couples



Congregation B'nai Jeshurun
Marriage Equality Hevra



"In our community, everyone has an important role. Straight or gay, woman or man, rich or poor, young or old - it makes no difference. Sadly, the commitment ceremonies we perform for gay and lesbian couples aren't matched by New York State legal recognition. Until that happens, we'll continue to work for full civil rights for all New Yorkers."

—Rabbi Felicia L. Sol
Congregation B'nai Jeshurun

"Being an active member of the Marriage Equality Hevra has helped me bring together, to fuse, what I thought were disparate parts of who I am -- being part of the Gay and Lesbian community and being Jewish."

—Linda Golding
Marriage Equality Hevra

"As a participant in the marriage equality forum, I have become part of a BJ community. It is wonderful to see my fellow Hevra members at Shabbat services and to know that we are working together towards a day when all families will be treated equally."

—Marlene Halpern
Marriage Equality Hevra

The very existence of the hevra reaffirms my commitment to the Jewish community, and my pride in being a BJ member. Knowing that I am part of a group of people who take the scriptural injunction to pursue justice seriously strengthens my own commitment to social action, not only for the GLBT community, and the Jewish community, but for all.

—Mark Horn

Why do New York same-sex couples want access to marriage?

Access to civil marriage is a necessary part of achieving equality for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and trans-gender (LGBT) families.

There are 700 rights and responsibilities that come from NY government with civil marriage. These protections include medical decision-making authority for a spouse, inheritance rights, control of a partner's bodily remains, access to Family Court. Many of these protections can be achieved only through marriage and cannot be obtained by any legal document a family may create.

Are the marriages of same-sex couples legally recognized in New York?

New York government is required under longstanding legal precedent and practice to recognize the marriage of couples, including same-sex couples who have been legally married in another jurisdiction, including same-sex couples. In this way, a same-sex couple who has gone to Canada and gotten married is as married as an opposite-sex couple holding a New York marriage license.

What is the difference between civil unions, domestic partnerships and marriage?

Civil unions are an institution created by individual states to give couples all of the rights and responsibilities that the state grants to civilly married couples. Domestic partnership is the status granted by some public and private entities to legally recognize an unmarried couple.

However, neither civil unions nor domestic partnerships are the same as marriage. So far only marriage has been explicitly recognized under federal law and among the states, and neither civil unions nor domestic partnership secure the federal rights that come with marriage.

Are civil and religious marriage the same thing?

No. Civil marriage is a relationship sanctioned by and licensed by the state. It does not require the blessing of any religious institution. Religious marriage is the spiritual blessing of a relationship by a religious institution. A religious marriage in New York State is not legally binding on the married couple unless they also secure a state marriage license.

Has there been legislation opposing legal recognition of LGBT couples?

Yes. Forty-four states have passed state Constitutional Amendments or so-called "Defense of Marriage Acts" (DOMA's), which define marriage for state purposes to exclude same-sex couples. It has not been determined whether these state anti-marriage laws are constitutionally permissible in denying full faith and credit to another state's marriages.

Is legalization of lesbian and gay marriages good or bad for the state?

Strong families make strong communities. LGBT families are in just as much need of governmental support as are other families. Without the safety net that government provides to all other families, they are more likely to become a social or financial burden on society as a whole. It has yet to be shown how extending the rights of marriage to LGBT families undermines, threatens or diminishes other marriages. Likewise, there is no evidence showing that children are harmed by being raised by parents of the same sex.