

[Please Place on Organizational Letterhead or Include Pertinent Information in Letter]

[Insert Date]

The Honorable Mark Leno
13th Assembly District
c/o Geoffrey Kors, Executive Director
Equality California
1127 11th Street, Suite 208
Sacramento, CA 95814
Fax: (916) 442-4616

RE: AB 43 (Leno), Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Protection Act – SUPPORT

Dear Assemblymember Leno,

On behalf of [Insert Organization Name], I am writing to express our strong support for Assembly Bill 43, the Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Protection Act. The bill would guarantee the California Constitution's promise of religious freedom while extending the vital protections afforded by marriage to loving, committed same-sex couples.

Existing law, California Family Code Section 300, defines marriage as "a personal relation arising out of a civil contract between a man and a woman." The Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Protection Act would amend Section 300 to read: "Marriage is a personal relation arising out of a civil contract between two persons," thereby returning California's marriage laws to gender-neutral terms, as they were from 1850 to 1977.

Current California law also provides registered domestic partners with a significant number of legal rights, benefits, responsibilities, duties, and obligations available to married couples. However, while California's domestic partner law is very important, it is not recognized by other jurisdictions and does not provide more than one thousand rights and responsibilities under federal law that are unavailable to domestic partners, including the right to sponsor a partner for immigration to the U.S., the right to collect social security survivors benefits, the right to family and medical leave, and the right to file joint federal income tax returns.

Furthermore, as the Massachusetts Supreme Court stated in its 2003 opinion requiring equal marriage rights in that state, "The history of our nation has demonstrated that separate is seldom, if ever, equal." Though domestic partnership provides an array of tangible benefits, fundamentally it sets up a separate and unequal system that cannot adequately safeguard same-sex couples in older age, upon illness or disability, or in times of crisis.

Marriage is not simply a legal status. It is a social institution that our society recognizes as the ultimate expression of love and commitment. Married couples are recognized as a family unit and are afforded a unique respect and dignity in our culture. AB 43 would provide critical social support and validation to tens of thousands of same-sex couples in California. Our organization strongly supports this important legislation, and we urge California to continue to be a leader in achieving equality for all its citizens.

Sincerely,

[Insert Name]

[Insert Title]

[Insert Organization's Name]