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Governor Linda Lingle Vetoes Civil Unions Bill

HB 444 would have offered protections for all Hawaii's families

HONOLULU – Today, a coalition of leading lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender organizations in Hawaii denounced Governor Linda Lingle for vetoing HB 444, Hawaii's Civil Union legislation. The bill provides that equal rights and responsibilities of married couples in Hawaii be afforded to thousands of non-married couples in the state – including same-sex couples. Coalition members include Equality Hawaii, the GLBT Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawaii, the Human Rights Campaign, PFLAG-Oahu and Pride Alliance Hawaii.

“Today is a sad day for the thousands of Hawaii families who remain second class citizens,” said Alan Spector, legislative affairs co-chair for Equality Hawaii. “We fail to see how the Governor's actions are in the best interest of Hawaii's future and are nothing more than political maneuvering at the expense of people's lives. We're disappointed and outraged that same-sex families will not be treated equally under Hawaii law, but vow to come back and fight this fight another day.”

“Today was the first time a civil unions bill passed both Houses in Hawaii by solid margins and was on the Governor's desk for signing,” said Jo-Ann Adams, Chair of the GLBT Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawaii. “With such broad support from the legislators, who are the elected officials closest to the public, and the consistent results of the professional polls showing broad support for civil unions as a civil rights issue, we are deeply disappointed that the Governor ignored the will of the people and vetoed the bill. We are determined, no matter how many sessions and election cycles it takes, to achieve full recognition for our families.”

“Americans nationwide share in the disappointment and outrage of thousands of Hawaii's families who will not receive equal treatment under law,” said Joe Solmonese, president of the Human Rights Campaign. “Thankfully, there are local advocates as well as leaders in the Hawaii legislature who will continue to further the cause of equality. For decades, we have been a loyal partner in this fight for fairness in the Aloha State and we pledge to stand with them for years to come.”

“Today, on July 6, 2010, Gov. Linda Lingle denied social justice when she vetoed HB444 for Civil Unions,” said Rev. Carolyn M. Golojuch, President of PFLAG-Oahu. “Her denial is a violation of the integrity of her office and a violation of her oath of office. Governor Lingle's denial of equal rights, benefits and protections for one segment of our citizens is a denial for all of our citizens of Hawaii.”

“The members of Pride Alliance Hawaii are greatly disappointed in Governor Lingle's decision to veto the Civil Unions bill and allow the state to continue its discriminatory practices against same-sex couples,” said Tara O'Neill, President of Pride Alliance Hawaii. “Two separate and independent economic studies, a poll conducted by a nationally recognized polling organization, and the thousands of residents who vocalized their support of the bill to the Governor and the Legislature over the past two

years makes clear that the passage of HB444 is good economic sense, is socially just, and is supported by the people of Hawaii. The LGBT community's fight for equality in Hawaii will continue.”

The coalition has worked closely together since 2008 to build both public and legislative support for HB 444. Through this joint effort, tens of thousands of phone calls, emails, postcards and handwritten letters have been generated urging legislators and the Governor to approve this legislation.

At this time, five states and the District of Columbia recognize marriage for same-sex couples under state law: Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, Vermont, and New Hampshire. Five states—California, New Jersey, Oregon, Washington, and Nevada—provide same-sex couples with access to the state level benefits and responsibilities of marriage, through either civil unions or domestic partnerships.

Hawaii, Colorado, Maine, Maryland and Wisconsin provide same-sex couples with limited rights and benefits. New York and Maryland recognize marriages of same-sex couples validly entered into outside of the jurisdiction. California recognized marriage by same-sex couples between June and November of 2008, before voters approved Proposition 8, which purports to amend the state constitution to prohibit marriage equality. Couples married during that window remain married under California law, but all other same-sex couples can only receive a domestic partnership within the state. The state will recognize out of state same-sex marriages that occurred before November 5, 2008 as marriages and those that occurred on or after November 5, 2008 as domestic partnerships. The Proposition 8 vote has been challenged in federal court; a decision from the trial court is expected this summer.

Same-sex couples do not receive federal rights and benefits in any state. For an electronic map showing where relationship recognition for same-sex couples stands in the states, please visit: www.HRC.org/State_Laws.

HRC and Equality Hawaii are launching statewide action alerts to members encouraging them to express their disappointment and outrage to Governor Lingle for her decision to veto the bill. More on the work in Hawaii is at www.hrcbackstory.org/category/states/hawaii/.