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**MOMENTUM FOR MARRIAGE FOR SAME-SEX COUPLES BRINGS TOGETHER
NEW ILLINOIS COALITION**

Pending legislation protects religious freedom, gives same-sex couples freedom to marry

CHICAGO, Dec. 20, 2012 – In the wake of the announcement by key legislators that they will seek passage of an Illinois marriage equality bill in January 2013, a broad range of organizations have joined to form a new coalition, called Illinois Unites for Marriage, organizers said Thursday. The coalition will be wholly focused on securing legislation giving same-sex couples the freedom to marry in early 2013.

Illinois Unites brings together a diverse group of individuals and organizations from across Illinois, including business groups, labor, faith organizations, Republicans, Democrats and grassroots supporters. The coalition is being organized by Equality Illinois, Lambda Legal and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Illinois.

"We are uniting to urge members of the Illinois General Assembly to let all Illinoisans express their love and life-long commitment through civil marriage," said Bernard Cherkasov, CEO of Equality Illinois, the state's oldest and largest LGBT advocacy organization.

"The momentum is undeniable – allowing same-sex couples to marry is the right thing for Illinois," said Jim Bennett, Regional Director of Lambda Legal. "It's best for our state that our government treat all families with equity and respect. Nine other states now have full marriage equality. It's time for Illinois to act."

The legislation, currently called HB 5170, would give gay and lesbian couples in Illinois the freedom to marry and thereby enter a life-long commitment of responsibility and respect. Recent polling indicates that a majority in Illinois supports giving same-sex couples the freedom to marry. Meanwhile, national polls as well as the November elections confirm that the American people have turned a corner on the issue.

"Same-sex couples will strengthen the institution of marriage," said John Knight, ACLU's LGBT Project Director. "They want to marry because of their love and commitment and because marriage provides them and their families with the security, support and legal protections that civil unions can never provide."

The three founding organizations of Illinois Unites for Marriage believe that the government should have a statewide policy treating all Illinoisans with dignity and respect. The coalition is working closely with the bill's lead sponsors, Representative Greg Harris (D-Chicago) and Senator Heather Steans (D-Chicago), who announced last week they would seek a January vote on the measure.

The Illinois marriage bill respects religious freedom. Every church and religious group will make its own decisions about whether to allow same-sex couples to marry in their faith. Faiths that do not want to embrace same-sex marriage will not have to.

The three founding organizations of Illinois Unites for Marriage believe that all Illinoisans deserve a statewide policy of fairness, dignity and equal treatment. Nine states plus the District of Columbia have already given same-sex couples the freedom to marry: Iowa, Washington, New York, Massachusetts, Vermont, Maine, Connecticut, New Hampshire and Maryland.

Illinois Unites for Marriage has launched a website, www.illinoisunites.org, with information about the bill and about how citizens can make their voices heard and organizations can express their support.

Organizations supporting the freedom to marry for same-sex couples include:

Affinity Community Services
African American Lesbian Professionals Having a Say
AIDS Foundation of Chicago
All Saints Social Justice Circle
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Illinois
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Council 31
Association of Latino Men for Action (ALMA)
Anti Defamation League
Chicago Bar Association
Chicago House
Chicago Jobs with Justice
Equality Illinois
Freedom to Marry
Howard Brown Health Center
Human Rights Campaign
Illinois Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (ICAAP)
Illinois Department of Human Rights
Illinois State Bar Association
Lambda Legal
PFLAG Belleville
PFLAG Bloomington/Normal
PFLAG Northern Illinois Council (14 Chapters)
Prairie Pride Coalition
Quad Citians Affirming Diversity
Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Healthcare IL and IN
Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1
Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 73
United Electrical Workers, Western Region
The Civil Rights Agenda

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