

**BEYOND SAME-SEX MARRIAGE**  
A NEW STRATEGIC VISION FOR ALL OUR  
FAMILIES & RELATIONSHIPS

July 26, 2006

We, the undersigned – lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) and allied activists, scholars, educators, writers, artists, lawyers, journalists, and community organizers – seek to offer friends and colleagues everywhere a new vision for securing governmental and private institutional recognition of diverse kinds of partnerships, households, kinship relationships and families. In so doing, we hope to move beyond the narrow confines of marriage politics as they exist in the United States today.

***We seek access to a flexible set of economic benefits and options regardless of sexual orientation, race, gender/gender identity, class, or citizenship status.***

We reflect and honor the diverse ways in which people find and practice love, form relationships, create communities and networks of caring and support, establish households, bring families into being, and build innovative structures to support and sustain community.

In offering this vision, we declare ourselves to be part of an interdependent, global community. We stand with people of every racial, gender and sexual identity, in the United States and throughout the world, who are working day-to-day – often in harsh political and economic circumstances – to resist the structural violence of poverty, racism, misogyny, war, and repression, and to build an unshakeable foundation of social and economic justice for all, from which authentic peace and recognition of global human rights can at long last emerge.

**Why the LGBT Movement Needs a New Strategic Vision**

***Household & Family Diversity is Already the Norm***

The struggle for same-sex marriage rights is only one part of a larger effort to strengthen the security and stability of diverse households and families. LGBT communities have ample reason to recognize that families and relationships know no borders and will never slot narrowly into a single existing template.

All families, relationships, and households struggling for stability and economic security will be helped by separating basic forms of legal and economic recognition from the requirement of marital and conjugal relationship.

U.S. Census findings tell us that a majority of people, whatever their sexual and gender identities, do not live in traditional nuclear families. Recognizing the diverse households that already are the norm in this country is simply a matter of expanding upon the various forms of legal recognition that already are available. The LGBT movement has played an instrumental role in creating and advocating for domestic partnerships, second parent adoptions, reciprocal beneficiary arrangements, joint tenancy/home-ownership contracts, health care proxies, powers of attorney, and other mechanisms that help provide stability and security for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual individuals and families. During the height of the AIDS epidemic, our communities formed support systems and constructed new kinds of families and partnerships in the face of devastating crisis and heartbreak. Both our communities and our HIV organizations recognized, respected, and fought for the rights of non-traditionally constructed families and non-conventional partnerships. Moreover, the transgender and bisexual movements, so often historically left behind or left out by the larger lesbian and gay

movement, have powerfully challenged legal constructions of relationship and fought for social, legal, and economic recognition of partnerships, households, and families, which include members who shatter the narrow confines of gender conformity.

To have our government define as “legitimate families” only those households with couples in conjugal relationships does a tremendous disservice to the many other ways in which people actually construct their families, kinship networks, households, and relationships. For example, who among us seriously will argue that the following kinds of households are less socially, economically, and spiritually worthy?

- Senior citizens living together, serving as each other’s caregivers, partners, and/or constructed families
- Adult children living with and caring for their parents
- Grandparents and other family members raising their children’s (and/or a relative’s) children
- Committed, loving households in which there is more than one conjugal partner
- Blended families
- Single parent households
- Extended families (especially in particular immigrant populations) living under one roof, whose members care for one another
- Queer couples who decide to jointly create and raise a child with another queer person or couple, in two households
- Close friends and siblings who live together in long-term, committed, non-conjugal relationships, serving as each other’s primary support and caregivers
- Care-giving and partnership relationships that have been developed to provide support systems to those living with HIV/AIDS

Marriage is not the only worthy form of family or relationship, and it should not be legally and economically privileged above all others. While we honor those for whom marriage is the most meaningful personal – for some, also a deeply spiritual – choice, we believe that many other kinds of kinship relationship, households, and families must also be accorded recognition.

### ***An Increasing Number of Households & Families Face Economic Stress***

Our strategies must speak not only to the fears, but also the hopes, of millions of people in this country – LGBT people and others – who are justifiably afraid and anxious about their own economic futures.

Poverty and economic hardship are widespread and increasing. Corporate greed, draconian tax cuts and breaks for the wealthy, and the increasing shift of public funds from human needs into militarism, policing, and prison construction are producing ever-greater wealth and income gaps between the rich and the poor, in this country and throughout the world. In the United States, more and more

individuals and families (disproportionately people of color and single-parent families headed by women) are experiencing the violence of poverty. Millions of people are without health care, decent housing, or enough to eat. We believe an LGBT vision for the future ought to accurately reflect what is happening throughout this country. People are forming unique unions and relationships that allow them to survive and create the communities and partnerships that mirror their circumstances, needs, and hopes. While many in the LGBT community call for legal recognition of same-sex marriage, many others – heterosexual and/or LGBT – are shaping for themselves the relationships, unions, and informal kinship systems that validate and support their daily lives, the lives they are actually living, regardless of what direction the current ideological winds might be blowing.

### ***The Right's "Marriage Movement" is Much Broader than Same-Sex Marriage***

LGBT movement strategies must be sufficiently prophetic, visionary, creative, and practical to counter the right's powerful and effective use of "wedge" politics – the strategic marketing of fear and resentment that pits one group against another.

Right-wing strategists do not merely oppose same-sex marriage as a stand-alone issue. The entire legal framework of civil rights for all people is under assault by the Right, coded not only in terms of sexuality, but also in terms of race, gender, class, and citizenship status. The Right's anti-LGBT position is only a small part of a much broader conservative agenda of coercive, patriarchal marriage promotion that plays out in any number of civic arenas in a variety of ways – all of which disproportionately impact poor, immigrant, and people-of-color communities. The purpose is not only to enforce narrow, heterosexist definitions of marriage and coerce conformity, but also to slash to the bone governmental funding for a wide array of family programs, including childcare, healthcare and reproductive services, and nutrition, and transfer responsibility for financial survival to families themselves.

Moreover, as we all know, the Right has successfully embedded "stealth" language into many anti-LGBT marriage amendments and initiatives, creating a framework for dismantling domestic partner benefit plans and other forms of household recognition (for queers and heterosexual people alike). Movement resources are drained by defensive struggles to address the Right's issue-by-issue assaults. Our strategies must engage these issues head-on, for the long term, from a position of vision and strength.

### ***"Yes!" to Caring Civil Society and "No!" to the Right's Push for Privatization***

Winning marriage equality in order to access our partners' benefits makes little sense if the benefits that we seek are being shredded.

At the same time same-sex marriage advocates promote marriage equality as a way for same-sex couples and their families to secure Social Security survivor and other marriage-related benefits, the Right has mounted a long-term strategic battle to dismantle all public service and benefit programs and civic values that were established beginning in the 1930s, initially as a response to widening poverty and the Great Depression. The push to privatize Social Security and many other human needs benefits, programs, and resources that serve as lifelines for many, married or not, is at the center of this attack. In fact, all but the most privileged households and families are in jeopardy as a result of a wholesale right-wing assault on funding for human needs, including Medicare, Medicaid, welfare, HIV-AIDS research and treatment, public education, affordable housing, and more.

This bad news is further complicated by a segment of LGBT movement strategy that focuses on same-sex marriage as a stand-alone issue. Should this strategy succeed, many individuals and households

in LGBT communities will be unable to access benefits and support opportunities that they need because those benefits will only be available through marriage, if they remain available at all. Many transgender, gender queer, and other gender-nonconforming people will be especially vulnerable, as will seniors. For example, an estimated 70-80% of LGBT elders live as single people, yet they need many of the health care, disability, and survivorship benefits now provided through partnerships *only* when the partners are legally married.

Rather than focus on same-sex marriage rights as the only strategy, we believe the LGBT movement should reinforce the idea that marriage should be one of many avenues through which households, families, partners, and kinship relationships can gain access to the support of a caring civil society.

### ***The Longing for Community and Connectedness***

We believe LGBT movement strategies must not only democratize recognition and benefits but also speak to the widespread hunger for authentic and just community.

So many people in our society and throughout the world long for a sense of caring community and connectedness, and for the ability to have a decent standard of living and pursue meaningful lives free from the threat of violence and intimidation. We seek to create a movement that addresses this longing.

So many of us long for communities in which there is systemic affirmation, valuing, and nurturing of difference, and in which conformity to a narrow and restricting vision is never demanded as the price of admission to caring civil society. Our vision is the creation of communities in which we are encouraged to explore the widest range of non-exploitive, non-abusive possibilities in love, gender, desire and sex – and in the creation of new forms of constructed families without fear that this searching will potentially forfeit for us our right to be honored and valued within our communities and in the wider world. Many of us, too, across all identities, yearn for an end to repressive attempts to control our personal lives. For LGBT and queer communities, this longing has special significance.

We who have signed this statement believe it is essential to work for the creation of public arenas and spaces in which we are free to embrace all of who we are, repudiate the right-wing demonizing of LGBT sexuality and assaults upon queer culture, openly engage issues of desire and longing, and affirm, in the context of caring community, the complexities and richness of gender and sexual diversity. However we choose to live, there must be a legitimate place for us.

### **The Principles at the Heart of Our Vision**

We, the undersigned, suggest that strategies rooted in the following principles are urgently needed:

- Ø Recognition and respect for our chosen relationships, in their many forms
- Ø Legal recognition for a wide range of relationships, households, and families, and for the children in all of those households and families, including same-sex marriage, domestic partner benefits, second-parent adoptions, and others
- Ø The means to care for one another and those we love
- Ø The separation of benefits and recognition from marital status, citizenship status, and the requirement that “legitimate” relationships be conjugal

Ø Separation of church and state in all matters, including regulation and recognition of relationships, households, and families

Ø Access for all to vital government support programs, including but not limited to: affordable and adequate health care, affordable housing, a secure and enhanced Social Security system, genuine disaster recovery assistance, welfare for the poor

Ø Freedom from a narrow definition of our sexual lives and gender choices, identities, and expression

Ø Recognition of interdependence as a civic principle and practical affirmation of the importance of joining with others (who may or may not be LGBT) who also face opposition to their household and family compositions, including old people, immigrant communities, single parents, battered women, prisoners and former prisoners, people with disabilities, and poor people

We must ensure that our strategies do not help create or strengthen the legal framework for gutting domestic partnerships (LGBT and heterosexual) for those who prefer this or another option to marriage, reciprocal beneficiary agreements, and more. LGBT movement strategies must never secure privilege for some while at the same time foreclosing options for many. Our strategies should expand the current terms of debate, not reinforce them.