

Re: Legislation Amending the Indiana Constitution

Dear Senators and Representatives:

We are Indiana clergy, leaders of faith communities, and other religious professionals. Our backgrounds and those of the people we serve vary widely. Our views on marriage differ. ***But we speak with one voice to oppose amending the Indiana Constitution to define marriage.***

The proposed “Marriage Amendment” would strip civil rights from committed same-gender couples. As many of us affirmed when supporting legislation to prevent sexual orientation discrimination in the workplace, public accommodations, and housing, each of our faith traditions emphasizes justice. ***For our society to be just, the civil rights of all people, even those with whom we may disagree, must be protected.*** We should not be writing discrimination into our State Constitution. This fact alone merits rejection of the Marriage Amendment.

In 2005, an Indiana University Center for Survey Research poll demonstrated that the majority of Hoosiers would favor legislation providing hospital visitation rights and inheritance rights for same-gender couples. It strains credibility to argue that such legislation could be enacted, let alone survive legal challenge, under the Marriage Amendment’s prohibition against the “incidents of marriage” being legally conferred upon unmarried couples. We find the blanket constitutional exclusion of same-gender committed couples from such rights to be unconscionable.

We are also persuaded that the proposed Marriage Amendment would interfere with religious liberty.

People of different faith traditions disagree on marriage-related issues. However, each of us who signs this letter respects the right of religious groups to decide whether or not to sanction marriage or other unions of same-gender couples. ***The Indiana Bill of Rights guarantees the free exercise and enjoyment of religious opinions, and prevents the giving of a legal preference to any creed.*** Preferring and codifying one particular religious view of marriage in the Indiana Constitution flies in the face of both of these guarantees.

The drafters of the Indiana Constitution included six provisions in Bill of Rights that seek, in various ways, to ensure that the government does not interfere with, or direct, religious beliefs or practices. We ask you to respect this grant of religious freedom and allow Indiana’s various faith communities to continue to discern their individual paths with respect to same-gender marriage or other same-gender unions.

The Marriage Amendment would increase discrimination and undermine religious freedom. We urge you to vote against it.

Respectfully submitted,

[Here we list the names of all clergy, leaders of faith communities, and other religious professionals who sign. For current list see enclosure.]