



Newspapers Across the Country Show Commitment to Gay Marriage

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By Troy Espera

In full-page newspaper advertisements appearing coast to coast Tuesday, more than 60 civic, religious, labor and civil rights leaders and organizations declared their commitment to working toward equality for gay and lesbian families.

The ads, titled "Marriage Matters," are appeared in 50 publications, including the *New York Times*, the *Fresno Bee* (Calif.), the *Cedar Rapids Gazette* (Iowa), the *Raleigh News & Observer* (N.C.), the *Capital Gazette* (Md.), the *Cook County Daily Herald* (Ill.) and *La Opinion* (Calif.). The ads featured photographs of five same-sex couples who have been together from five to 53 years and read, on behalf of the diverse signatories, "They're committed. So are we."

Two-thirds of the signatories are non-gay allies, including nine prominent labor leaders, heads of six leading civil rights organizations, 11 religious leaders and several mayors, in addition to 14 national lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender organizations.

"We want the nation to know that we are united in fighting to end discrimination against gay and lesbian families, including their exclusion from marriage, with all its protections, responsibilities and human significance," said **Alice Huffman**, president of the California Conference of the NAACP, in a media release issued Tuesday. "We're also underscoring that not only are we in this for the long haul, but that the gay community has real allies."

The advertisements come at a moment of widening and deepening support for the legal recognition of same-sex relationships, including the freedom to marry. Polls in Massachusetts, the first state to end gay couples' exclusion from marriage, show a clear majority (59 percent) of residents now support marriage equality, according to a recent poll by the Center for Public Opinion Research at Merrimack College Bay State.

"Public support for legal recognition of same-sex couples has steadily grown in spite of an enormous and well-funded campaign based on defamation and fear, including dozens of anti-gay state constitutional amendments battles," said **Matt Foreman**, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, in a statement Tuesday. **"Even our opponents understand it is not a question of whether we will win dignity and equality for our families, but when."**

The legal landscape, however, has been mixed. Three weeks ago, New York's highest court issued an adverse ruling in a challenge brought by couples who had been denied marriage, shifting the debate to the state Legislature. Also, an anti-gay state constitutional amendment was upheld in Nebraska federal court, while courts in other states issued procedural rulings refusing to block votes on anti-gay measures.

Yet during the same period, there were also advances in state courts and state legislatures. Anti-gay amendments failed to advance in both the Massachusetts and Pennsylvania legislatures. The Arkansas Supreme Court unanimously overturned a ban on foster parenting by gay people, and the American Academy of Pediatrics again strongly reaffirmed the fitness of gay parents and made clear that ending the denial of the freedom to marry is in the best interests of children.

"As in every other struggle for social justice, there will be advances and setbacks along the way," said **Evan Wolfson**, executive director of Freedom to Marry, in a statement issued to the media Tuesday. "History is not defined by what happens over a few weeks or months, but by progress over many years. On that score, we've made incredible progress toward fairness and a fulfillment of America's commitment to equality."

