- 7. Marriage helps people of all income levels, but provides the most help to couples with the fewest financial resources. Legal marriage serves as the "poor man's lawyer," granting couples a wealth of protections in one fell swoop that otherwise could only be approximated by a series of legal instruments costing thousands of dollars.
- **8. Polls show District voters support equality.** According to a 2006 poll by Lake Research Partners, 78 percent of African American voters in D.C. believe gay couples deserve the same legal protections as everyone else. Even Bishop Jackson complained at last year's Values Voters summit about the lack of support he was getting in D.C.
- 9. The claim that marriage has remained unchanged for millennia is preposterous. As Empire State Pride Agenda points out, "Marriage is a dynamic institution that has evolved throughout history to meet the needs of society. In fact, much of what was associated with marriage in the past would today be incomprehensible to the majority of Americans. This includes arranged marriages, payment of a dowry, the legally inferior status of women in the marital relationship, polygamous marriages and royal and aristocratic marriage between relatives, such as first cousins."
- 10. When same-sex couples choose marriage we embrace responsibility and strengthen our families and communities. When two people of whatever gender seal their mutual love and commitment with a marriage contract, the community is strengthened. Children are better protected when both of their parents are legally responsible for them, and marriage is the best way of assuring this. Civil unions and domestic partnerships lack the universal recognition and legal certainty of marriage. That is why a ballot initiative is a bad idea how would you like your neighbors voting on *your* marriage? Protecting all the families in our city is a simple matter of justice. Let's keep D.C. on the right side of history.

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Defending D.C. Marriage Equality

May 30, 2010

"We hurt our fellow citizens and our community when we deny gay people civil marriage and its protections and responsibilities. Rather than divide and discriminate, let us come together and create one nation. We are all one people. We all live in the American house. We are all the American family. Let us recognize that the gay people living in our house share the same hopes, troubles, and dreams. It's time we treated them as equals, as family."

— Rep. John Lewis

Even as D.C. sets records for new marriage license applications, we still need your help to preserve our hard-won civil marriage equality. Help us make it clear to the radical right that we will not allow well-funded outsiders to exploit or divide us. GLAA offers the following points as a resource to assist you in talking with family, friends, and neighbors on why it's important to preserve D.C.'s marriage equality law and to avoid putting each other's rights up for a popular vote.

Defending D.C. Marriage Equality

- 1. Thank and reward our allies for their support. Of the elected officials who supported our city's historic passage of marriage equality legislation, seven D.C. Council members and Mayor Fenty are up for re-election this year. Of course, there are many reasons for supporting a given candidate other than marriage equality. But no incumbent should lose his or her seat on account of having supported the rights of same-sex couples. Anti-gay activists who cry "Let the people vote!" miss the point that D.C. voters repeatedly elect gay-affirming legislators.
- 2. D.C. voters have long supported diversity and inclusiveness, including equal rights for their LGBT neighbors. Several anti-gay ministers thundered against domestic partnerships and sodomy law repeal in the early 1990s, to no avail. It has been three decades since an anti-gay candidate has been elected in our city. The last D.C. politician to make homophobia a centerpiece of his campaign was Vincent Orange, who as a mayoral candidate in 2006 said his rivals were "not morally fit" for office because they supported marriage equality. He lost badly. Now, as he runs for Council Chair, he denies saying it. Much of our opposition comes from outside the city. Ward 9 voters can neither elect nor defeat anyone.

3. More than 200 D.C. clergy have signed a declaration of support for marriage equality:

"We are District of Columbia clergy and religious leaders of many faiths, races, ethnicities, and sexual orientations. We represent religious institutions in every ward in the District. We have worked together over many years for peace and justice and now join our voices again to speak a faithful word for freedom and equality.

"We declare that our faith calls us to affirm marriage equality for loving same-sex couples.

"Our religious traditions and scriptures teach us that wherever love is present, God is also present. One of God's greatest gifts to us is our human capacity to love one another. The ability of two people to enter into relationships and form families of love and care is one expression of this gift. It is holy and good. We therefore affirm the right of loving same-gender couples to enter into such relationships on an equal basis with loving heterosexual couples.

"We recognize that there are principled differences on this issue within the religious community. We affirm that the state should not require any religious group to officiate at, or bless, samegender marriages. However, the state also should not favor the convictions of one religious group over another by denying individuals their fundamental civil right to marry whom they love.

"Recognizing that there is heartfelt disagreement on this issue, we call on all people of the District of Columbia to engage in a respectful and loving dialogue on marriage equality. As religious leaders, we commit ourselves to such a dialogue and encourage our colleagues on all sides of this issue to do the same.

"God is love and love is for everyone. In this spirit we raise our voices in the struggle for the right and freedom to marry."

- 4. No religious organization is required to conduct or approve of same-sex marriages. Neither have any ministers been forced to conduct weddings for people who were previously divorced. This issue is a red herring. On the other hand, ministers who DO want to be able to marry same-sex couples are now able to, on the same basis as for other couples in their congregations.
- 5. Bishop Harry Jackson, carpetbagger. Bishop Jackson, who leads a congregation in suburban Maryland, presented himself as a champion of D.C. residents' right to vote at the same time he was urging Congress to overturn decisions by those voters' representatives. D.C. voters are not Jackson's true constituents. Reports filed with the D.C. Office of Campaign Finance show that Jackson's group Stand for Marriage D.C. is funded by the outside groups Focus on the Family, the National Organization for Marriage, the Family Research Council, and Jackson's own High Impact Leadership Coalition.

Even D.C. ministers who are not ready to support marriage equality have steered clear of Jackson's inflammatory demonstrations. They resist being exploited by right-wing evangelical ministers who seek to distract them from more pressing issues like health care, jobs, and education in favor of a divisive and emotional fight that helps no one.

6. Demographic trends favor equality. Marriage equality opponents often point to the success of anti-gay ballot measures in other states as proof that voters agree with them. What they overlook is that the vote margins have narrowed in recent years, indicating a gradual shift in favor of marriage equality. In 2008, for example, the vote on California's Proposition 8 (52 to 48 percent) was much closer than the previous time Californians voted on the issue (in 2000, passing Proposition 22 by 61 to 39 percent). Time and demographics are on our side. Our neighbors increasingly recognize that we are contributing members of our communities, not a threat to them.