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**MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT OF  
MARRIAGE EQUALITY FOR SAME-SEX COUPLES**

Interfaith IMPACT of New York State affirms that the civil right of marriage should be available in New York State regardless of gender for all otherwise qualified couples. Marriage equality will strengthen communities and benefit all the people of New York.

IINYS supports A.07732/S.4401, "An Act to Amend the Domestic Relations Law in Relation to the Ability to Marry." This bill provides same-sex couples the same opportunity to enter into civil marriages as opposite-sex couples. The bill also provides that no member of the clergy may be compelled to perform any marriage ceremony.

There is a great deal at stake for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) couples in their search for equality. LGBT families are barred from 1,324 New York State rights and responsibilities, because they are denied access to marriage. Bills signed into law in the last few years, such as the law giving domestic partners control of a loved one's remains after they die, or the law giving domestic partners the same hospital visitation rights as spouses, are important steps in the right direction, but more is needed. The civil right of civil marriage should be available to couples regardless of gender.

The principle of church-state separation requires a distinction between religious marriage and civil marriage. Each religious group should have the right to define marriage in its own way. People of faith and goodwill can and do disagree about what constitutes marriage; however, New York law should not impose a single, religiously-biased definition of marriage on all citizens.

To ensure that the Marriage Equality bill does not improperly intrude into matters of conscience or religious belief, this bill affirms that no member of the clergy can be compelled to solemnize any marriage. It grants equal access to the government-created legal institution of civil marriage, while leaving the religious institution of marriage to its own separate, fully autonomous sphere.

The members of IINYS strongly support marriage equality as a civil right, and we ask the New York State Assembly and Senate to pass A.07732/S.4401 this year. We stand on the side of love, compassion and responsibility in supporting full civil rights for LGBT families. This is truly about equality for all people.

Interfaith IMPACT of New York State is a statewide coalition of congregations and individuals from Protestant, Unitarian Universalist, Reform Jewish and other faith traditions working for the common good in New York through progressive religious advocacy.

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