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## NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **IT'S CRUNCH TIME! The LOFT Urges All to Get Involved and Contact Representatives!**

*MARCH 1, 2004, White Plains, NY*—Reacting to a proposal by President George W. Bush to amend the Constitution of the United States, The LOFT calls for all who believe in acceptance, tolerance and equality to immediately contact their state and federal representatives. In his announcement on Tuesday, February 25, 2004, President Bush said:

“Today, I call upon the Congress to promptly pass and to send to the states for ratification an amendment to our Constitution defining and protecting marriage as a union of a man and woman as husband and wife.” He goes on to say that: “The amendment should fully protect marriage,” but he does not say how.

Hearing this, Yvette Christofilis, Executive Director of The LOFT, says: “In the rush to fully discriminate against a group of people, targeting them by sexual orientation alone, the President does not explain how he proposes to ‘protect’ the more than 50% of all heterosexual marriages that end in divorce. And it seems that he has forgotten the many, many families of couples and of single parents whose lives are overwhelmed by tragedies such as domestic violence, poverty, and substance abuse. How will this amendment help these families?”

It is clear that this endorsement for a constitutional amendment springs out of, first, the Massachusetts Supreme Court decision, and then the act of civil disobedience in San Francisco. Beginning on Thursday, February 12, Gavin Newsom, the mayor of San Francisco, started issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples. As the acts of civil disobedience spread (same-sex marriages were performed locally in New Mexico and in New York), the President renewed his call for a constitutional amendment.

The amendment he’s speaking about is the Federal Marriage Amendment that is making its way through both the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate (H.J. Res.56 & S.J. Res.26). Opposed to the amendment, Christofilis noted that: “Many Americans, conservative, moderate and liberal, have spoken out against this amendment. Those in the halls of power who want it are working to push it through as quickly as possible. They know that the quicker it gets through, the easier it will be to pass. We must alert our representatives that we don’t want to change our constitution to make discrimination the law of the land.”

### **NEWS UPDATE**

The Social Security Administration announced Friday it has told its offices nationwide not to accept marriage certificates from San Francisco as proof of identification for newlyweds looking to make name changes on Social Security cards.

San Francisco Mayor, Gavin Newsom called the move “political and retaliatory.” “The president is not only now discriminating against gay couples, he’s discriminating against straight people,” he said. Newsom also said his administration looks forward to arguing the constitutionality of same-sex marriages before the California Supreme Court. The California high court on Friday declined a request by Attorney General Bill Lockyer to immediately shut down San Francisco’s same-sex weddings. More than 3,400 such ceremonies have been performed since the city began issuing the licenses Feb. 12. The justices told the city and a conservative group that opposes gay marriage to file new legal briefs by March 5 in response to the attorney general’s petition. Earlier, lower-court judges also declined to immediately end the same-sex marriages. “Not only did two lower court judges . . . determine there is no irreparable harm being done, now the Supreme Court said the same thing,” Newsom said.

In New Paltz, New York, Mayor Jason West married 25 same-sex couples on Friday, February 27, and has a waiting list of 500 other couples waiting to get married. Ulster County District Attorney Donald Williams Jr. said he warned West that marrying a couple without a license is illegal, adding, “What concerns me is the allegation that a public official knowingly violated that law.” The same-sex couples didn’t receive marriage licenses in New Paltz because the town clerk refused to grant them. West is convinced that he is breaking no laws with this action.

The New York State Health Department has said state domestic-relations law bars the issuing of marriage licenses to same-sex couples and that New York courts have recognized only marriages between men and women. However, New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer turned aside a request from the state Health Department seeking an injunction to stop future same-sex weddings and to declare the nuptials null and void. He is waiting for a ruling from the courts on whether the unions are legal.

## **CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES**

The Federal Marriage Amendment has versions pending in both the United States House of Representatives and in the United States Senate (H.J. Res.56 & S.J. Res.26). The joint amendment reads:

“Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman. Neither this Constitution or the constitution of any State, nor state or federal law, shall be construed to require that marital status or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon unmarried couples or groups.”

**It is important that your representatives know how you feel. A federal constitutional amendment banning same-sex civil marriage codifies the second-class citizenship of LGBT people. Let your representatives know that, and let them know that you know it.**

### **Contact Your Representatives:**

Go to: <http://www.house.gov/writerep/> for the name and contact information of your district representative.

For senators, go to: <http://www.senate.gov/> for your U.S. Senator.

**Contact President George W. Bush. It is important that the President of the United States is aware that the American people prefer the expansion of individual freedom over big government.**

E-mail: [president@whitehouse.gov](mailto:president@whitehouse.gov)

Mail: The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW

Washington, DC 20500

Phone: 202-456-1111

**Sample Letter:**

As your constituent, I urge you to oppose the “Federal Marriage Amendment” (H.J. Res. 56/S.J. Res. 26). This measure would amend the U.S. Constitution to define marriage as strictly between a man and a woman as well as invalidate all the protections that many families currently enjoy.

I believe that amending the Constitution is an extreme act. I have read that the proposed amendment would deny the right to marry to gay and lesbian couples and also obliterate the family rights that many same-sex couples – and unmarried heterosexual couples – and their families now have. Revising the Constitution to incorporate discrimination against anyone in America is wrong and should be rejected.

I also believe that the Federal Marriage Amendment is unnecessary and wrong. Even though the country has periodically struggled with the question of marriage – the last law prohibiting people of different races from marrying was overturned only 35 years ago – we have never taken the step of amending the Constitution to define marriage. Now is not the time to begin to use the Constitution as a tool for discrimination. Congress certainly has more important issues to consider.

The Federal Marriage Amendment rejects American traditions of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I have read that it would reverse the constitutional tradition of protecting individual freedoms. None of our constitutional amendments restrict individual freedoms. In fact, the amendments to the Constitution have been the source of most of the Constitution’s protections for individual liberty rights. I understand that the proposed amendment, by contrast, would deny all protection for the most personal decisions made by millions of people in committed long-term relationships. Again, I urge you to oppose this dangerous amendment. I look forward to hearing your views on this matter.

**Send a free e-mail or fax to your senator:**

<http://www.aclu.org/LesbianGayRights/LesbianGayRights.cfm?ID=9977&c=101>

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Many state-wide and national LGBT organizations have Marriage Centers on their web sites with additional information on same-sex civil marriage:

**The Empire State Pride Agenda:** <http://www.prideagenda.org/briefingpackets/marriage/marriage.html>

**The Human Rights Campaign:**

<http://www.hrc.org/Template.cfm?Section=Center&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=63&ContentID=15110>

**The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force:** <http://www.nglft.org/marriagecenter/index.cfm>

**Marriage Equality:** <http://www.marriageequality.org/>

**Marriage Equality NY:** <http://www.marriageequalityny.org/>

**Freedom to Marry (National):** <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/>

*The LOFT is a community center for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and supportive community in the lower Hudson Valley. The LOFT facilitates a wide range of educational, health/social service, and recreational programs and serves as an advocate for improved services and economic/legal protections*

*for our community. The LOFT also seeks to promote mutual respect and understanding throughout the community, and to eliminate prejudice and discrimination through outreach and educational programs. The LOFT is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit, community-based organization.*

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