

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATIVE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, & TRANSGENDER (LGBT) CAUCUS

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
JULY 11, 2005**

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LGBT CAUCUS ANNOUNCES REVIVAL OF MARRIAGE EQUALITY BILL IN THE STATE SENATE

Hearing Set in Senate Judiciary Committee

Sacramento, CA - The six members of the California Legislative Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Caucus today announced the amendment of language previously contained in Assemblyman Mark Leno's AB 19 into a vehicle currently in the Senate, AB 849. The bill has been referred to the Judiciary Committee and will be heard tomorrow, Tuesday, July 12.

Following the near passage of AB 19 in the State Assembly on June 2nd, LGBT Caucus members decided to continue consideration of the bill in this legislative year. If the bill passes the State Senate, it will go back to the Assembly for concurrence in the amendments.

"We will seek Senate support to move AB 849 out of the Senate and back to the Assembly for a vote this year," announced Senator Sheila Kuehl (D - Santa Monica), Chair of the Legislative LGBT Caucus. "The issue of marriage equality is not going to disappear after just one vote. The continuing harm being done to couples and families across this state merits our action now," she said. The LGBT Caucus currently consists of six members: Senators Sheila Kuehl, Christine Kehoe and Carole Migden and Assemblymembers Jackie Goldberg, John Laird and Mark Leno.

"I am buoyed by the support of many of my colleagues in the Senate, who are co-authors of the measure, and who believe we can pass this bill this year and move it out of the Assembly and to the Governor's desk this September," stated AB 849's lead author, Assemblyman Mark Leno (D - San Francisco). "Because civil rights battles are never won in a day, we must move this issue forward whenever we can. This is the year to do it. We came so close to victory in June. With a few more months to make our case, the Caucus believes we will prevail," he said. The bill will again be sponsored by Equality California, the statewide LGBT civil rights advocacy organization.

"With the recent support of coalition partners like the NAACP and the United Farm Workers, Equality California is extremely optimistic about passing the Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Protection Act," said Equality California Executive Director Geoffrey Kors. "Anti-equality organizations try to cherry pick different communities and go after us one at a time. By joining forces, and supporting equality for all, we can defeat these offensive efforts and move forward to create a state where all people are treated equality and with respect."

AB 849 repeats the language formerly in AB 19, amending the section of the California Family Code defining marriage to provide that it is a civil contract between two persons, instead of a civil contract between a man and a woman. The bill also reaffirms that no religious institution would ever be required to solemnize marriages contrary to its fundamental beliefs. It is likely to be co-authored by as many if not more than the 30 co-authors of AB 19.

"This is the civil rights issue of the decade," said Senator Carole Migden (D - San Francisco). "The tide is changing. We're closer every day. Success is inevitable."

"When we ensure that all Californians are treated equally, we strengthen our own freedoms and liberties. When we stand up for one another, everyone shares in that victory because we will have demonstrated that discrimination, in any form, has no place in our laws," added Senator Christine Kehoe (D-San Diego).

The contents of the amended version of AB 849 have already been approved by the Assembly Judiciary Committee and the Assembly Appropriations Committee in the form of AB 19. In the Senate, AB 849 will be considered by the Senate Judiciary Committee, and, upon passage, will move to the Senate Appropriations Committee before moving to the Senate floor in August or September. If approved, it would then go back to the Assembly floor, with the result that the subject matter of the bill will have had full hearings in both houses.

"We must end California's endorsement of second-class citizenship for its LGBT citizens," said Assemblymember Jackie Goldberg (D - Los Angeles). "Over the past year we built a strong foundation of 37 elected representatives of the people in support of marriage equality for all Californians. That is something to build on, not walk away from," concluded Assemblymember John Laird (D - Santa Cruz).

The Legislative LGBT Caucus was formed in June 2002. The caucus' role is to present a forum for the California Legislature to discuss issues that affect lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Californians and to further the goal of equality and justice for all Californians. Formation of the LGBT Caucus made California the first state in the country to recognize an official caucus of openly-LGBT state legislators.

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