

Dear Chairman Leahy and Judiciary Committee Members:

As the committee considers the Respect for Marriage Act (S.598), we write as state and local leaders where marriage equality is recognized urging you to end federal discrimination against our citizens. Tens of thousands of loving and committed gay and lesbian couples have been strengthened because our states recognize their equal right to marry. These couples work hard, pay taxes and share the same values as other married couples but they are constantly hamstrung in their ability to protect themselves and their families because of the discriminatory Defense of Marriage Act.

DOMA prevents any of the over 1,100 federal rights, benefits and responsibilities of marriage from being afforded to same-sex couples or their families. These include Social Security survivor benefits, federal employee health benefits for spouses, protections against spouses losing their homes in cases of severe medical emergencies, the right to sponsor a foreign born partner for immigration, the guarantee of family and medical leave and the ability to file joint tax returns, among many others. While we are proud that our states have eased the burdens on families, these provisions of federal law are beyond our purview and Congressional action is required.

By denying federal recognition for some of our states' lawful marriages, DOMA does not just deny married same-sex couples these and other critical rights and benefits. It disrespects our states' decisions to treat all of our citizens equally, and even requires our states' governments, when we jointly administer federal programs like Medicaid, to actively discriminate against our own lawfully-married citizens.

We also write because DOMA does more than just hurt gay and lesbian couples – it affects all of our constituents. First and foremost, it hurts the children of same-sex couples, who suffer from the financial instability DOMA creates for their parents. For LGBT youth, DOMA sends a dangerous message that that they cannot be full and equal citizens of their country. DOMA also harms parents and siblings and friends who must step in with financial and emotional support to mitigate these problems. And perhaps most of all, DOMA is a stain on our common values.

The federal government should not be in the business of picking which marriages it likes and which it does not, but that is exactly what DOMA does. We urge you to pass the Respect for Marriage Act and ensure that all families are afforded equal protections and equal dignity.

Sincerely,

Governor Andrew Cuomo
New York

Governor Dannel Malloy
Connecticut

Governor Martin O'Malley
Maryland

Governor Deval Patrick
Massachusetts

Governor Lincoln Chafee
Rhode Island

Governor Peter Shumlin
Vermont

Mayor Thomas Menino
Boston, MA

Mayor Bill Finch
Bridgeport, CT

Mayor Pedro E. Segarra
Hartford, CT

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa
Los Angeles, CA

Mayor John DeStefano, Jr.
New Haven, CT

Mayor Michael Bloomberg
New York, NY

Mayor Jerry Sanders
San Diego, CA

Mayor Edwin Lee
San Francisco, CA

Mayor Vincent C. Gray
Washington, DC