

## **STEPHANIE PAPPAS, Equality Utah Board Chair**

Thank you for joining us today. My name is Stephanie Pappas. I am the Board Chair of Equality Utah. Joining me today are Equality Utah Board and Staff members, leaders in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, allies of our community, Senator Scott McCoy and Representative Christine Johnson. Following my opening remarks, we will hear comments from Equality Utah's Executive Director Mike Thompson, and our Manager of Public Policy Will Carlson. Following these comments, we will take questions.

Over this recent election cycle, there has been much emotion around California's Proposition 8 – emotion on both sides of the issue – and these emotions have been especially high here in Utah, home of the LDS Church, which played a visible and active role in the Yes on 8 campaign.

While we disagree with the LDS Church's position on Proposition 8, we respect that their position is based on the guiding principles of their faith. Throughout the campaign, while the LDS Church stated its support of Proposition 8, it also made repeated comments that the Church "does not object to rights for same-sex couples regarding hospitalization and medical care, fair housing and employment rights, or probate rights." Just last week, Elder L. Whitney Clayton stated the LDS Church does not oppose "civil unions or domestic partnerships."

This is the purpose of our Press Conference today. We are taking the LDS Church at its word. In response, we will be introducing legislation to address each of the policies mentioned by the LDS Church. Will Carlson, our Manager of Public Policy, will provide a brief outline of this legislation.

## **WILL CARLSON, Equality Utah Manager of Public Policy**

In response to LDS Church statements, and in line with Equality Utah's mission to secure equal rights and protections for gay and transgender Utahns, we will be working to introduce the following bills for the 2009 General Session of the Utah Legislature:

### **1. Hospitalization & Medical Care**

Most gay people with insurance cannot insure their family. This bill will mandate that insurance plans, which extend benefits to an employee's spouse, also cover an employee's partner. When insurance plans cover families, they should cover every family member.

### **2. Fair Housing & Employment**

Currently, it is legal to fire a person from her job or evict a person from his home just for being gay or transgender. The Fair Housing and Workplace bill will expand on HB 89, introduced by Representative Christine Johnson in the 2008 session. It will add sexual orientation and gender identity to the list of characteristics employers and landlords may not consider when making employment or housing decisions.

### **3. Probate Rights – Wrongful Death Amendments**

The death of a loved one is painful. When someone dies, we can protect the family's financial security by removing barriers to inheritance and insurance. As part of this effort, we will continue to support Senator Scott McCoy's Wrongful Death Amendments legislation.

### **4. Domestic Partner Rights & Responsibilities Act**

The term "marriage" has proven to stir up many conflicts. Aside from marriage, we can do much more to help committed couples care for each other. This bill creates a statewide domestic partner registry as exists in California and attaches rights of inheritance, insurance and fair housing.

### **5. Repeal of part 2 of Utah's Amendment 3**

A registry that covers inheritance, housing, and insurance is not the legal equivalent of marriage. Yet the second part of Amendment 3 has been misinterpreted to avoid any recognition of gay couples. Laws that deny basic protections under the law should be repealed. This bill will repeal the portion of Amendment 3 which states "no other domestic union; however, denominated, may be recognized as marriage or be given the same or substantially equivalent legal effect."

We are taking the LDS Church at its word regarding these basic protections and we hope to gain their support as we work to secure these rights and responsibilities. Here to present our closing comments and our invitation to action is Mike Thompson, Executive Director of Equality Utah.

#### **MIKE THOMPSON, Equality Utah Executive Director**

As Stephanie stated earlier, there has been, and continues to be, much emotion around Proposition 8 and the issue of marriage equality. While our position on marriage equality may differ from the LDS Church's position, I believe we share the desire to provide protections for gay and transgender Utahns -- protections that do not compromise the Church's position on, and definition of, marriage.

Proposition 8 has created a great divide. Now is the time to look for opportunities to bridge that divide and create the needed protections, rights and responsibilities for Utah's gay and transgender people. This will be Equality Utah's focus and we ask the LDS Church to support these efforts.

In its November 5<sup>th</sup> statement, "Church Responds to Same-Sex Marriage Votes," the LDS Church suggests collaborative efforts -- "*As we move forward from the election, Church members need to be understanding and accepting of each other and work together for a better society.*" In order to achieve a better society and to achieve our vision of a fair & just Utah, we must secure equal rights and protections for gay and transgender Utahns and their families. We hope the LDS Church will demonstrate its compassion to its gay members and its members who have gay family and friends by exhibiting its support of these issues.

The LDS Church has already proven its willingness to engage in political issues. We invite the church to participate again -- around these legislative issues -- issues the Church does not oppose.

As part of this effort, we would like to ask the LDS Church the following questions:

1. The LDS Church has stated that it does not oppose same-sex couples receiving such rights as “hospitalization and medical care, fair housing and employment rights, or probate rights?” Will the LDS Church be willing to **support** efforts to secure these rights?
2. Is the LDS Church willing to assign a member of its Presidency of the Seventy to lead Church efforts to secure these rights, just as it did with Proposition 8?
3. As it did in California, will the First Presidency draft a letter to Utah Latter-Day Saints in support of rights and protections for gay couples?
4. As it did in California, will the First Presidency ask for this letter to be read to all Utah congregations on a specified date?
5. Will the First Presidency ask that all members of the LDS Church do all they can do, including “donating their means and their time”, to assure that gay couples receive such rights as hospitalization and medical care, fair housing and employment rights, or probate rights” -- just as it asked its members to do in support of California’s Proposition 8?
6. Will local Church leaders provide information to its members about how to get involved in supporting such rights, just as it did in California?
7. Finally, we ask members of the LDS Church, will you ask your church leaders to support these efforts?

As the Church called for collaboration to achieve a better society, we hope there will be a demonstration of these convictions. Regardless of one’s position on marriage equality or beliefs around sexual orientation and gender identity, rights and responsibilities are needed for gay and transgender people and their families. We agree with the LDS Church, we *can* achieve a better society...if we work together. We hope the LDS Church will respond with a resounding YES and demonstrate its true convictions on these issues.

For those who wish to support this effort and who understand the important role these rights play in the lives of gay and transgender people – rights that do not threaten traditional marriage, they may sign our petition of support at [www.equalityutah.org](http://www.equalityutah.org)

Thank you. We will now answer any questions you may have.