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## **Equal Rights for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People**

*Regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, everyone deserves certain fundamental rights including freedom from discrimination, protection from hate-motivated violence, and the right to legally establish partnerships through marriage. Marriage is a fundamental right that heterosexual people take for granted.*

I support repeal of the federal Defense of Marriage Act, and believe that federal law should explicitly grant lesbian and gay couples the right to civil marriage. I am proud to have been one of just a few dozen legislators to have opposed Maine's "Defense of Marriage" legislation in 1997, and to have spoken out against it on the floor of the Maine House. I support repeal of the so-called "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" military policy instituted in 1993. I am in favor of allowing lesbians and gay men to serve in the Armed Forces without persecution. According to the Government Accountability Office, 9,480 troops were discharged from the military from 1993 to 2003 due to the policy, costing at least \$95.4 million in recruiting costs and \$95.1 million for training replacements. Forcing gay, lesbian, and bisexual service men and women to hide who they are is discriminatory, violates human rights, and wastes tens of millions of taxpayer dollars.

I also support two other measures currently being considered by Congress: First, the Matthew Shepherd Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which will expand hate crimes coverage to include gender, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and individuals with disabilities. Second, the Employment Nondiscrimination Act (ENDA). The ENDA would provide fair employment measures and prohibit discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender employees. Recently, there has been controversy in Congress about whether transgender individuals should be covered under ENDA. On November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007, with a vote of 235-184, the US House of Representatives passed a revised version of ENDA, which fails to protect transgender people in employment practices. I believe that it is important that ENDA extend non-discrimination protections on the basis of gender identity as well as sexual orientation and I would support the inclusion of transgender individuals in the future.

In addition, I am heartened by the recent Maine Supreme Judicial Court's ruling that same-sex couples can now adopt children therefore strengthening the families of Maine. This historic ruling effectively ends discrimination against same-sex couples who want to adopt children together and establish legal relationships with their children thereby ensuring medical and legal protections for both parents and their children that are already established for heterosexual parents and children.

I have committed to supporting equal rights since voting for equal civil rights and hate crime protections for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people here in Maine. I will continue this support and advocacy on the federal level until all Americans are equally protected under the law. In sum, we need to protect fundamental human rights by

providing all Maine families the same opportunity for growth and nurturance now guaranteed to heterosexual families. We need to address discrimination that has restricted employment opportunities for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Most importantly, we need to continue working to reduce the violence and social stigmatization that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people experience. I envision a world in which all individuals are treated equally under the law, whose families are valued and honored, and communities in which lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people live in safety with their heterosexual neighbors.