



PO Box 22416 Honolulu, HI 96822
(808) 543-6054

prideatworkhawaii@hawaiiantel.net
www.hawaflcio.org/PAWHI

January 25, 2011

Hawaii State Senate
Committee on Judiciary and Labor
Chair, Sen. Hee
Vice Chair, Sen. Shimabukuro

Testimony in favor of SB232 – Relating to CIVIL UNIONS

Pride At Work Hawai'i, as an affiliate of the Hawai'i State AFL-CIO which works to mobilize lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) workers and their supporters for full equality and to build mutual support between the labor movement and the LGBT community, strongly supports SB 232. As drafted, the bill would create civil unions for same- sex and opposite-sex couples in Hawai'i, providing them all the rights, benefits, and responsibilities of marriage under Hawai'i law.

Over the past four decades, labor support for the rights of LGBT workers has grown tremendously as LGBT union members began to come out and add their issues (such as domestic partner health coverage and anti-discrimination clauses) to the list of bargaining items in negotiations. LGBT workers also came to understand that, given their extreme vulnerability, a strong union contract was an important protection against retaliation and discrimination and for fairness in the workplace. And heterosexual workers came to understand that their co-workers - their union brothers and sisters who they walked picket lines with and worked alongside - were entitled to the same rights and protections as they were: to protect and provide for themselves and their families.

Today, as you consider this bill that would allow same-sex couples the option of becoming partners in civil unions, know that Hawai'i's labor movement strongly supports equality as well. The 2007 convention of the Hawai'i State AFL-CIO, in endorsing civil unions legislation, declared that, "while civil marriage is the only true equality under the law, if the government is offering civil unions as a way to provide protection, support, and respect for GLBT families, unions should support those efforts." The State AFL-CIO has reiterated its support for civil unions both in its 2009 convention and through its legislative initiatives.

In fact, unions across the country understand that until the government legally recognizes same-sex relationships, many thousands of families will be deprived of the most important attributes of their labor:

the ability to take care of and provide for their family members. To change this, many national and international unions have passed resolutions in favor of marriage equality, including: American Federation of Government Employees, American Federation of Musicians, American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees, American Federation of Teachers, Communications Workers of America, National Education Association, Office and Professional Employees International Union, Service Employees International Union, United Farm Workers and UNITE-HERE. State and local labor federations which have endorsed marriage equality include the California Federation of Labor, the Connecticut AFL-CIO, the New York State AFL-CIO, the King County Labor Council (Seattle, WA), Northern Shore Labor Council (MA), Rochester and Genesee Valley Area Labor Federation (NY), San Francisco Central Labor Council, and Southeastern Massachusetts Labor Council.

In California, over 50 unions and labor groups were part of the effort to protect marriage equality there, pointing out that “unions often take political and legal action to protect their members, not only in connection with their employers, but in connection with broader social questions... [Unions] take the position that all... are entitled to be treated with equal dignity and respect.” In New York State, the labor federation noted that “the denial of marriage equality hurts not just individuals, but also family members, neighbors and co-workers who care about the well-being of same-sex couples and the children in their care,... and discriminates against them and relegates them to second-class citizenship.”

The labor movement recognizes that same-sex couples are devoted to each other and love their families, and that without official recognition, they are left vulnerable. In these difficult and uncertain economic times, it is more important than ever to give all workers a fair shake as they struggle to provide for their families. It is deeply unfair that same-sex couples and their families are forced to scramble to cobble together a patchwork of legal documents that still don't provide them with the security and protections they need and deserve. Passage of civil unions legislation is a step in the right direction.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB232. On behalf of all LGBT workers in Hawai'i, and their families, we urge you to support this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

Steve Dinion, President	Wayne Akana, Vice President
Amy Donahue, Treasurer	Morgan Evans, Secretary