

March 10, 2025

Dear Chair Larson and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Ron Hildahl, and I am an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ, and I am a gay man. I have lived in North Dakota for 24 years and I enjoy working and living here. Yet my love for this state, this place I call home, gets challenged when resolutions such as HCR 3013 and other hurtful legislation is brought forth.

For a point of reference, thirty-nine countries have legalized same-sex marriage. In those countries and in the United States, the definition of marriage between a man and a woman has not been rejected or diminished. By legalizing same-sex marriage, the definition of marriage has been expanded to include same-sex couples.

Chapter 14-03 of the North Dakota Century Code is entitled "Marriage Contract." It states that marriage is a civil contract between consenting parties. For those individuals who have a strong religious conviction to be married in a church and to hold strongly to the belief that marriage is only between a male and a female, that's fine. Yet on the list in the North Dakota Century Code of those who can solemnize marriage, ordained ministers and clergy are number four on the list. The reality is that not all couples are people of faith or want a religious ceremony yet there are so many arguments pointing to the biblical definition of marriage. As a person of faith, and as a person who can officiate a marriage ceremony, I'm thankful that the United Church of Christ, along with at least thirteen other faith traditions, recognizes, affirms, and endorses same-sex marriage.

If there are people who truly believe that marriage is a sacred institution between one man and one woman, guess what?, it still is. And for those who believe that marriage is a sacred institution expanded to include same-sex couples, the dignity and legality of an opposite-sex marriage doesn't change.

For the past eight years I've been in a long-term relationship with my male partner. We are gainfully employed and productive individuals who contribute and give back within our communities. If and when we choose to be married, we would benefit from health insurance coverage and benefits from an employer, inheritance rights, tax benefits, hospital visitation and medical decisions, legal protection, and recognition; as it should be. A same-sex marriage should never be 'less than' or different from an opposite-sex marriage.

Yet even if the United States Supreme Court or other future legislation starts to take away rights and privileges from me and other LGBT individuals, please know that I will still be working hard at my job making a difference in my community and in my state. Please know that my partner and I will continue to live authentically as a same-sex couple. Rulings and laws will not change who I am or negate my relationship, nor will I be forced to live in the shadows of a closet.

Out of respect to the Supreme Court decision and out of respect for countless same-sex couples, I strongly urge that you oppose HCR 3013. Thank you for your consideration.

Rev. Ron Hildahl
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