

The chair and the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

I will be direct and concise. My name is Jessie Grounds. I am a two-time combat veteran, married to my husband for 11 years, and we have been together for 14 years. I have resided in Bismarck, North Dakota, since 2018, having returned to be near my family and contribute to this state's economy.

I anticipate much of the testimony against marriage equality will focus on religious beliefs, the 2014 Supreme Court decision, and states' rights. While I acknowledge the complexities of federalism, it is crucial to recognize that participation in the United States, as with the formation of North Dakota as a state, entails relinquishing certain individual rights in exchange for collective benefits.

My personal life, including my marital status, is a matter of individual liberty. It is not the purview of the state, nor is it the concern of anyone other than myself and my spouse. I reiterate, as I stated in my previous communications, that the private lives of consenting adults are not a matter for legislative intervention.

The core issue is not the term "marriage" itself. It is about the legal rights and responsibilities associated with it. Specifically, it is about the over 90+ federal benefits and protections afforded to married couples. I seek equal access to these benefits. If alternative legal frameworks, such as civil unions or other designations, provide identical rights and protections, I am amenable to such solutions. My objective is to achieve parity with heterosexual couples.

This matter concerns the fundamental right to equal protection under the law. As legislators, you have sworn an oath to uphold the Constitution. I urge you to consider whether the state has the authority to deny a class of citizens their constitutional rights.

Your primary role is that of legislators, representing the interests of all constituents. Personal religious beliefs should not dictate public policy that infringes upon the rights of others.

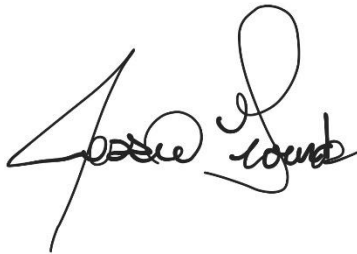
Before casting your vote, I ask you to consider the following: Does the state have the right to deny a citizen their fundamental rights? If so, on what legal basis? Personal beliefs, whether religious or otherwise, cannot supersede the constitutional guarantee of equal protection.

Furthermore, I remind you that the principle of equality extends to all aspects of life. If one chooses to invoke religious judgment, all individuals, regardless of their personal beliefs or circumstances, will be held to the same standard.

I respectfully request that you consider your decision and vote in favor of maintaining marriage equality.

Jessie Grounds

415.666.6080

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jessie Grounds". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.