



**NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice Urges Yes Vote on
Respect for Marriage Act**

Dear Senator,

Our mission at NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice is to educate, organize, and advocate for federal policies that embody racial, economic, and social justice. For almost 50 years, we have been guided by Catholic Social Teaching, which tells us to place the needs of people at the margins of society at the center of our advocacy. Founded by women religious in the 1970s, we continue their legacy today by building a just society that ensures that all people have what they need to live dignified lives. We are proud to have over 100,000 supporters across the country who share our passion for justice.

At NETWORK Lobby, we recognize the dignity and importance of all families and it is because of this that we proudly support the bipartisan Respect for Marriage Act. Introduced by Senators Baldwin, Collins, and Feinstein, the Respect for Marriage Act repeals the discriminatory Defense of Marriage Act and codifies the right to civil marriage, regardless of sexual orientation or race. Discrimination on any basis has no place in our country.

Since the Supreme Court Decisions on *Loving v. Virginia* and *Obergefell v. Hodges*, countless families have begun to receive basic social benefits that previously had not been available to them. These families have contributed significantly to their communities and have raised children in supportive and loving ways. These children are major beneficiaries of the legal unity of their parents and they share in benefiting from these social benefits. As we work towards fostering a beloved community, the sanctity of the family should be protected and dignified. Respect and dignity should not be limited on the basis of race or sexual orientation.

Regardless of the nature of sacramental marriage in the Catholic tradition, civil marriage touches other more economic and legal aspects of life. Federally recognized marriages allow couples a wide variety of abilities that could be restricted without marriage. Examples include but are not limited to the ability to sponsor a spouse during the immigration process, veteran's disability and Medicaid benefits, parenting rights to a child's records in school, family visitation rights during incarceration, next of kin status during times of crisis, medical and/or bereavement leave, domestic violence intervention and protection orders, and spousal privilege in court. These benefits promote stability for families, safety and



health for individuals, and there are more than 1,000 other benefits that all legally married couples deserve to access.

This legislation takes a critical moral step by erasing the stain the Defense of Marriage Act has left on our national record. This 1996 legislation defined marriage, for federal purposes, as the union between one man and one woman and allows states to refuse to recognize valid same-sex marriages in other states. This legislation denied same-sex couples access to federal benefits and protections. These protections are critical to ensuring family stability and economic security. While *United States v. Windsor* effectively ended DOMA, this discriminatory law remains on the books. Repealing this statute is necessary to guarantee protection.

Secondly, the Respect for Marriage Act protects all marriages federally. Specifically, the legislation establishes “place of celebration” as a federal standard. This means that for federal purposes an individual will be considered married if the marriage is or was valid in the state it was performed. This gives both interracial and same-sex couples equal protection under federal law. It retains federal benefits in case Obergefell is ever overturned, guaranteeing the safety and security of families who benefit from federal programs. We believe that all families regardless of race or sexual orientation deserve to be given equal social benefits.

Finally, the legislation prohibits any state employee from denying full credit to an out-of-state marriage based on the sex, race, ethnicity or national origin of the individuals in the marriage and provides pathways for the legal defense of this right. This too is required to ensure uniformity throughout the United States.

NETWORK Lobby urges all Senators to vote for the Respect for Marriage Act. The bill protects the sacred nature of all families and ensures equality in communities across the country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary J. Novak". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.

Mary J. Novak
Executive Director
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice