

From the Desk of Rabbi Jonathan Spira-Savett
rabbijon.com

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Dear Governor Lynch:

I am the rabbi of Temple Beth Abraham, a congregation of about 280 families in the greater Nashua area affiliated with the Conservative movement in Judaism. I am writing as an individual to urge you to sign two bills, should they arrive at your desk: HB436-FN-LOCAL regarding same-sex marriage and HB415 concerning equal rights regardless of gender identity or expression.

From my perspective as a citizen and a person of faith, these bills unequivocally further equality and justice in our state. I am a member of Keshet Rabbis, a national group within my religious movement who offer ourselves publicly as advocates, listening ears, and supporters of GLBT Jews. I would officiate at a marriage ceremony between two men or two women, just as I would for a woman and a man who wish to be married. My religious movement has in the past year and a half officially opened the doors of its American seminaries to gay and lesbian applicants who wish to become rabbis.

HB436 would grant full recognition by New Hampshire of those marriages I perform. I respect the bill's provision not to force religious clergy of other faiths to perform same-sex marriages and I think it is an indispensable part of the bill. Truthfully, I am more and more convinced that the state should grant only civil unions to all couples, and leave the word "marriage" in the purview of religious groups. Until that solution is before us, I see HB436 as the best next step toward ensuring that same-sex couples enjoy every right and privilege that the government guarantees to traditionally married couples.

It is important for me to express my view to you as a religious Jew. So much of the argument against the bill comes from those who think that America is a "Christian nation" or even a "Judeo-Christian nation", and who represent themselves as the sole authentic voice of that family of religious traditions. As a Jew I am deeply offended and concerned when I hear these things. I prize America and the state I live in because, in the words of the American Constitution, they strive to promote "a more perfect" society and "establish justice." I feel excluded by those who dare to speak with such certainty in the name of my God. They are not the only people of faith.

HB415 is a simple matter of equality and the fight against hate. Transgender individuals are among the most misunderstood in our society, targets of discrimination and hate crimes. As a religious person, I see each person regardless of gender identity or expression as the image of God, a person of infinite worth deserving all the protections of our laws.

While I do not send this letter on behalf of my congregants, I am sharing it with them, posting it on my website, and encouraging discussion of subjects in the coming weeks. I think it is important that you know of religious leaders in New Hampshire who support these bills as a matter of conscience, so that you can gauge more fully what the people of the state want concerning these issues.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Jonathan Spira-Savett