

**Testimony of Juanika Ballard in Support of the  
Maryland Religious Freedom  
and Civil Marriage Protection Act**

Good Afternoon, my name is Juanika Ballard and I thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today and share my story. On behalf of my family, my wife Monica Williams and our three sons, I urge you to pass the Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Protection Act.

Monica and I both were born and raised in Maryland. We met, over six years ago, at Set the Captives Free Church in Baltimore. I knew she was the person I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. We wanted to be married in Maryland, but in June 2009, we went to Connecticut because at that time it was the closest place we could marry.

For over ten years, I have been a Baltimore County police officer. Like my fellow officers, it's my job to protect the people of Baltimore County. In 2009, while on the job, I was injured when an out-of-control driver slammed into my patrol car. I had to be cut from my patrol car and airlifted with a broken back to the hospital. My wife Monica was at my side throughout the ordeal that followed. She nursed me back to health so that I could get back to protecting the people of Baltimore County.

When Monica's father died just a few weeks ago, I wanted to be by Monica's side, at the funeral and family gathering afterwards. But I was told by the Police Department that I could not take the same bereavement leave other married spouses on the force can count on. I'm also being told that I cannot have spousal health insurance for Monica, who has returned to school to get her degree in order to make a better life for our family. My wife is diabetic, and it's critical that she have insurance. She should be able to rely on the spousal coverage from my employer, but we are being denied that protection.

Under Maryland law my out-of-state marriage *should* be recognized, but the Baltimore County Police Department is refusing to do so. While Monica and I turned to Lambda Legal to help us get the spousal protections my employer owes us, we should not have to fight just to be treated as other married couples are. You should not have to get a lawyer just to ensure that basic protections other married couples can rely on for their families are available to you, your spouse and children.

Our family is like many Maryland families. We are hard-working, we are active in our community, and we are people of faith. In fact, we remember when Delegate Dwyer came to speak at our church in Baltimore and he said that civil marriage for same-sex couples should not be allowed in Maryland. The arguments he made that Sunday were hurtful and really out of touch with who we are and the rights we need to protect our family. Like my fellow officers, every day I leave home to do my job to protect the people of Baltimore County, and my wife Monica worries that I will be hurt in the line of duty. No one can predict the future, but we want to know that Monica can count on the safety net there for other spouses on the police force. There is no substitute for the security and protections that come to hardworking families through marriage.

In ending discrimination in marriage, I can protect my family like my fellow officers do. Ending discrimination in marriage will make my family stronger and will make Maryland stronger.