

**Testimony in Support of the Maryland Religious Freedom
and Civil Marriage Protection Act, S.B. 116**

Good Afternoon, my name is Stacy Pipkin and I am joined today by my wife Barbara Pipkin and our 10 month old son Caiden. We would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today and share our story with you.

For nearly 30 years Barbara has worked with developmentally disabled adults at a Maryland non-profit. For the past 11 years I have worked for Anne Arundel County Public Schools. We both have jobs we believe in and are inspired to do, and we feel good about the contributions we make to our community. Helping others is a guiding principle for us, one we intend to instill in our son as well. We volunteer, give to charity, attend church and strive to help our friends and neighbors. I feel I can say that we are good people. We are not asking to be treated in a “special” manner, only in the same way others are treated. Unfortunately right now the laws in the state of Maryland cause us to be treated differently. We have experienced this first hand.

We have been together for 12 wonderful years and when marriage equality became law in Washington DC, we jumped at the opportunity. We were overjoyed to share our wedding day with our family, our friends and our son, who was our best man. After we were married I applied for spousal health benefits from my employer, Anne Arundel County Public Schools. Under Maryland law my out-of-state marriage *should* be recognized, but my employer nonetheless is refusing to do so. My employer thinks it is perfectly acceptable to deny me these benefits while giving them to my non-gay coworkers. If a co-worker who is heterosexual marries in Washington DC they would be given these benefits, but I am not. My marriage certificate is not treated the same by my employer, based solely on my sexual orientation. While Barbara and I have turned to lawyers at Lambda Legal to help us get the spousal protections my employer owes us, we should not have to fight to be treated like other married couples.

This is not the first time I have had basic employment protections denied because of my sexual orientation. Almost two years ago Barbara’s grandmother passed away at 94 years of age. “Nana” and I thought of each other as grandmother and granddaughter, not merely in-laws. However, when she died I was denied even one day of bereavement leave. I should have been able to mourn my Nana and support my spouse without worrying about my job security or have been made to feel like I was being discriminated against.

As an employee of a school system I am keenly aware of the fact that our actions as adults have direct impact on our children. I worry about the message it sends to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender teenagers when a school system treats its lesbian and gay employees and their families differently.

Because we do not have the same protections as other married couples, we procured every legal document one can have: wills, powers of attorney, advanced directives and more. And when we adopted Caiden we were both named as parents. We married in Washington DC. But our family is still not being seen as equal. My employer doesn’t give us the same protections it

gives to other married employees, and we have to fight to have our marriage recognized as it should be. If Maryland allowed same-sex couples to marry none of this would be a problem. Denying these rights to Barbara and me is bad enough, but in so doing they are denied to my son as well. By treating us differently the State of Maryland treats our son differently. And that is not acceptable.

So I am here today to implore you to do the right thing. Please give Marylanders Marriage Equality so that all families are treated equal. I want you to remember my family. Remember my adorable son. Please do not allow the state in which he grows to be a man to continue to treat his family differently than any other. Like all other 10 month olds his future holds endless possibilities – you may be looking at your future president, or the scientist that cures cancer, or the guy that works on your car. No matter who he becomes he needs the same protections as any other child in Maryland. He deserves for his family to be treated equally.