



HONPA HONGWANJI MISSION OF HAWAII

STATE HEADQUARTERS

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Marriage Equality in Hawaii

At the 98th Legislative Assembly of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii held in February 2010, presided over by State President Mr. Alton Miyamoto and Bishop Thomas Okano, the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii, upon the recommendation of the HHMH Committee on Social Concerns, officially adopted a resolution supporting the rights of same-gender couples which was shared with the General Public. In February 2011, Civil Unions were recognized in the State of Hawaii.

On September 9, 2013, the Honorable Governor Neil Abercrombie called for a Special Session of the Hawaii State Legislature relating to Marriage Equality or Same-sex Marriage. The Senate Hearing was held on October 28, 2013 and the House Hearing was held on October 31, 2013, at both Hearings Bishop Eric Matsumoto of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii testified in person in support of Marriage Equality with the following moving testimony.

In Strong Support of Senate Bill 1 Relating to Equal Rights

(Testimony given at Senate Hearing and House Hearing by Rev. Eric Matsumoto, Bishop)

I would like to express my strong support of Senate Bill 1. The Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii is the largest Buddhist denomination in Hawaii with 33 temples throughout the State. For nearly 125 years, we have been sharing the message of an All-Inclusive Wisdom and All-Embracing Compassion which aspires for the peace and happiness of all existence. Guided by Great Wisdom and Compassion, we are encouraged to equally respect all people. The Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii's support of marriage equality is based on the equality of all people.

We believe that marriage equality is a basic civil right of any person. Further in any relationship, what are most important are the commitment, respect and trust that people bring to the relationship. The choice to marry the person you love is a freedom that should not be denied to anyone. Gay and lesbian couples wish to marry for similar reasons as anyone else – to make a lifetime commitment filled with love and fidelity to the person they love.

I believe that religious freedom is adequately protected by the bill. It is clear that no member of the clergy will be required to perform a wedding ceremony with which he or she does not agree. On the other hand, the passage of the bill will provide clergy the opportunity to marry all individuals who are deeply committed to each other. It is clear that some religious denominations will perform marriages for same-gender couples, and some will not, just as some houses of worship perform interfaith marriages and some will not. This bill does not change this fact.

This bill expands religious freedom and rights to more people in our Nation through our State. I believe it is in the spirit of our great Nation and our Aloha State to welcome, embrace and provide for all people. I know our ministers would welcome the opportunity to perform weddings for same-gender couples as it also affirms our spiritual values. True Compassion and Aloha includes all!

I humbly ask for your support for same-gender couples having the right to marry in Hawaii. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Bishop Matsumoto was also one of several clergy who spoke at a rally held by supporters at Capitol Rotunda which was also attended by Rev. Shindo Nishiyama and Rev. Toshiyuki Umitani. Bishop Matsumoto was present at the State Capitol during various times throughout the special session to show the support of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii. There were some tense moments between supporters and



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opponents who had gathered at the State Capitol, but in the end Hawaii lived up to its name of the Aloha State.

Rev. Blayne Higa, Chairperson of the Committee on Social Concerns, also sent letters of support to all Senators and Representatives on behalf of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii. He delivered an Invocation at the opening of the House of Representatives to provide guidance to those in attendance. He served as the critical link between the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii and various other supporting organizations such as Hawaii United for Marriage, ACLU, other clergy in support of marriage equality and many other groups including Legislators. Bishop and he were invited to attend the By-Invitation only signing of the Bill by the Governor of Hawaii held at the Hawaii Convention Center on November 13, 2013 which made Hawaii the 15th State together with the District of Columbia in the Nation to recognize same-sex marriage. In attendance to witness this significant moment was Representative Richard Onishi of Hilo, Hawaii.

The support and presence of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii, as the largest denomination of Buddhism in Hawaii, was appreciated by many supporters and seems to have impacted a significant number of individuals including Legislators. Bishop Matsumoto stated that he was very proud to represent the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii and expresses his appreciation to the Members and Supporters of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii for sharing their perspective and value on the equality of all people with the rest of the Community. He is overjoyed that Jodo Shin Buddhists are being guided by Wisdom and inspired by Compassion and that is making a difference in our world.

Truly thanks to the support and dedication of so many people all across the State who supported Marriage Equality by submitting written and oral testimony, contacted Legislators, participated in rallies, signed petitions and informed the Honpa Hongwanji of their support and appreciation, we have marriage equality in our State. Thank you for your support! Let us continue our efforts to promote more awareness, mutual respect and understanding among all people. Thank you!