

Stand for Equality
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Since Virginia law has prohibited marriage between persons of the same sex since 1975 and has voided same sex marriages from other states since 1997, the need to pass an “Affirmation of Marriage Act” in 2004 is less than clear. Certainly lobbying pressure from The Family Foundation, Concerned Women of America, and other conservative organizations for legislators to prove their conservative credentials played a role. But the preamble to HB 751 as it was introduced provides the greatest insight into the motivation for the bill.

The introduced version of HB 751 claims that if “same sex unions are a civil right, then legal sanctions and coercion will be used against persons and institutions opposed to homosexual behavior or same sex unions. For example, schools in their Family Life and other programs will have to teach that ‘civil unions’ or ‘homosexual marriages’ are equivalent to traditional marriage; churches whose teachings do not accept homosexual behavior as moral will lose their tax exempt status; employers will be ineligible for government contracts unless they will hire and provide benefits to the ‘married homosexuals’ and their ‘spouses’ and ‘partners’...” The bill goes on for a page and a half with imagined fears, reckless references to Governor Dean, and warnings that civil unions “will radically transform the institution of marriage with serious and harmful consequences to the social order.” (For the full text of the introduced bill, go to <http://legis.state.va.us>.)

No one has ever introduced a bill to allow civil unions in Virginia or to repeal the current prohibition on same sex marriages. Yet by a margin great enough to enact the law over the Governor’s veto, HB 751 becomes law in Virginia on July 1. In the final language of the bill, “partnerships contracts or other arrangements” were added to civil unions as being prohibited. “Any contractual rights created thereby shall be void and unenforceable.”

What the new law does to medical directives, powers of attorney, business partnerships and other legal arrangements between two members of the same sex is less than clear. Even less clear are the ways in which the new law is supposed to protect traditional marriages.

Protesters are taking to the streets this week to oppose the new law. Gays, lesbians, and their families and supporters are raising legitimate questions about a hateful law of unknown effect. I voted against it on every occasion. A website has been established – www.virginiaisforhaters.org. Boycotts of Virginia products are being planned. Thousands of dollars of taxpayers’ money will be used to defend the law in court. The state is looking pretty silly in the eyes of many people. This did not need to happen. The General Assembly should never have passed such a bill and certainly not over the Governor’s veto. Now the mess must be cleaned up. The law must be repealed next year.