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September 24, 2009

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House of Representatives
235 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Conyers, Jr., Chair
U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary
2138 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy, Chair
U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: HR 3567, *The Respect for Marriage Act*

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Reid, Chairman Conyers, and Chairman Leahy:

I am writing to express my support for HR 3567, *The Respect for Marriage Act*, which seeks to repeal the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). DOMA is an unconstitutional, unprecedented, discriminatory and damaging law that does great harm to families by denying them access to critical rights and protections and important economic safety nets. I support HR 3567 because it addresses DOMA's failings head-on by repealing it and thus, acknowledges these significant rights and protections.

In 2004, Massachusetts became the first state to allow same-sex couples to marry. Since that time, more than 16,000 committed and qualified same-sex couples have married in our state. Over the past five years, our families and our communities have seen the many important benefits that come from recognizing equal marriage rights. Indeed, our residents have strengthened familial bonds, which has in turn increased the stability and security necessary to better protect and care for loved ones.

Unfortunately, we have also seen how many of our married residents and their families are harmed in very real and negative ways because DOMA denies them access to hundreds of rights and protections, such as: federal income tax credits, employment and retirement benefits, death and survivor benefits, health insurance coverage, medical leave, and Social Security payments. The time has come for this injustice to end.



Massachusetts has a single category of married persons and, consistent with our state and U.S. Constitution, views all married persons equally. DOMA, however, divides that single category into two distinct and unequal classes of marriage in our state. When a state, such as Massachusetts, confers rights and responsibilities on a couple through the grant of a civil marriage license, that married couple is entitled to the same rights and protections as any other married couple in that state. It is for these reasons that I filed a lawsuit earlier this year challenging the constitutionality of DOMA and seeking to strike down this unjust and discriminatory law.

While our lawsuit remains pending, I applaud the legislative efforts to take direct action to repeal DOMA, and as such, I support HB 3567. Thank you for your consideration and do not hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Martha Coakley". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Martha Coakley

Cc: The Honorable Jerrold Nadler