



Why Civil Unions Aren't Enough

By Greta Christina, Greta Christina's Blog

Posted on July 28, 2007, Printed on August 31, 2007

<http://www.alternet.org/story/57722/>

There are plenty of reasons why civil unions really aren't equal to marriage -- even if the rights and responsibilities spelled out in a state's civil union law are identical to marriage in every way.

There are legal reasons why they're not equal -- marriage is recognized in every state and indeed every country, while civil unions aren't; so the rights and responsibilities don't necessarily travel with you when you leave the state that granted them.

There are emotional reasons -- marriage is an institution/ ritual/ relationship that has existed for thousands of years, one that has tremendous resonance in our culture in a way that civil unions simply don't. And there are moral reasons -- as history has born out, separate but equal is pretty much by definition not equal.

But if none of those convince you, here's a really good practical one.

As of right now, five months after New Jersey's Civil Union Law took effect, at least [1 out of every 7 civil-union couples](#) in New Jersey are not getting their civil unions recognized by their employers.

One out of 7 is 14 percent.

If 14 percent of married couples in New Jersey were being denied full, legally-guaranteed marriage benefits by their employers, there'd be outraged stories on every news source in the region, and quite possibly rioting in the streets.

And actually, it's probably more than 1 out of 7. The 1 out of 7 figure comes from 191 complaints reported to [Garden State Equality](#) (out of 1,359 civil-union couples) -- and chances are excellent that not everyone who's having problems is reporting it. And before you ask -- no it's not just one big bad company that's skewing the results. According to Garden State Equality, the 191 cases involve close to 191 companies.

So civil unions aren't just legally unequal to marriage; they're not just emotionally unequal; they're not even just morally unequal. They're unequal in the most literal, practical sense of the word. Even in the state where the civil union is the law, people in civil unions are not being treated the same by their employers as people who are married.

I get that civil unions are a big step forward. There are times when I'm astonished by the fact that "well, same-sex marriage is out, but civil unions would be okay" has become the moderate position on the issue, maybe even the moderate- to- conservative position.

I get that they're better than nothing -- heck, six out of seven civil-union couples in New Jersey are getting their benefits, and that's not trivial. And I get that, the Supreme Court being what it is right now, it may not be the best strategy to put same-sex marriage to a test on the national level until we get some new faces on the bench.

I'm just saying: It's not the same. It's not enough. And I am disinclined to pretend that it is. This fight will not be over in this country until same-sex marriage is legal and fully-recognized in all 50 states. You can put nice cushions in the back of the bus -- but it's still the back of the bus.