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## A shameful denial of rights

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When a husband or wife is hospitalized, a spouse deserves the right to be informed of their health status and be consulted for any life or death decisions. Spouses also have the legal right to have a say about shared property, the well being of their children and a host of other issues critical to their lives together. These are only a few of the legal rights that heterosexual, married couples benefit from and take for granted, But gay and lesbian couples –who also share their lives and raise families together – are denied these fundamental legal protections.

A legal marriage is not merely symbolic. There are 1,138 rights and responsibilities that are given to married couples by the federal government, according to the Empire State Pride Agenda. Another 1,324 rights and responsibilities come from New York State government—but these rights come only with a legally-sanctioned marriage license.

To deny same sex couples the right to get married, is to deny them basic legal rights.

A legal marriage is not the same thing as a religious union. The right to a legal marriage by same sex couples does not infringe on any religious freedoms. No religion or congregation need recognize or consecrate a union that runs against their beliefs. No customs or religious practices need change. None. Yet, conservative religious and political groups continue to stoke irrational fears. Legislation that would allow same-sex marriage is caught up in politics in Albany, where some legislators are worried about political blowback for supporting this measure.

We call on these legislators to muster the courage to do the right thing. New York needs a fair law to protect same sex couples and families that have been shamefully marginalized for far too long.

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