



MassEquality Records

1987-2008

18 boxes (23.25 linear ft.)

Call no.: MS 674

Collection overview

MassEquality was formed in the late 1990s as a coalition of advocacy groups seeking to build legislative support for same-sex marriage and gay rights in Massachusetts. Formally incorporated as a 501(c)4 organization in late 2001, the coalition hired its first employee, Campaign Coordinator Marty Rouse, in late 1993, and achieved a landmark success that November when the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts ruled that the state may not "deny the protections, benefits and obligations conferred by civil marriage to two individuals of the same sex who wish to marry." On May 17, 2004, Massachusetts became the first state in the nation to allow equal marital rights to same-sex couples. Since that time, MassEquality has continued to champion marriage equality nationally.

The MassEquality Records document the origins, operations, and activism of one of the leading organizations in New England advocating for marriage rights and civic equality for all, regardless of sexual orientation. The collection includes some material generated by the Freedom to Marry Coalition, a partner in the coalition, and a series of large banners and posters, some of which were displayed during the event celebrating the arrival of marriage equality in Massachusetts.

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Background on MassEquality

Formed in the late 1990s as an informal coalition of national and local organizations, MassEquality is dedicated to fighting for the legalization of same-sex marriage. Eventually, the loose coalition of the 1990s transformed into a well-organized coalition working to oppose legislation that would officially ban same-sex marriage. The defining moment for MassEquality came on November 18, 2003, when the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court decided in favor of marriage equality in *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health*, ruling that the denial of the protections, benefits, and obligations of civil marriage because that person was married to a person of the same sex was a violation of the Massachusetts state constitution. The court went to



MassEquality sticker.

tate that a gay marriage ban "works a deep and scarring hardship on a very real segment of the community for no rational reason." *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health* reignited MassEquality and provided the coalition with the momentum needed to become a powerful advocacy organization. Since its first inception, MassEquality has grown from a small unfunded coalition to a multi-million dollar campaign with over ninety coalition partners, a membership base of 40,000, a statewide grassroots volunteer structure, a strong presence in the media, and a statewide reputation within policy circles as a significant political force.

In the years after *Goodridge*, the Commonwealth faced a flurry of referenda and proposed amendments to the state constitution to ban same-sex marriage, and MassEquality expanded and strengthened its infrastructure to in defense. In particular, House Bill 3190, the Marriage Affirmation and Protection Amendment, not only proposed to ban same-sex marriage in Massachusetts, but to prohibit civil unions and domestic partnerships as well, denying same-sex couples and their families health insurance benefits, access to pension and Social Security benefits, and automatic hospital visitation rights. This amendment narrowly passed during the first Constitutional Convention in March 2004, but was defeated at the required second Convention the following September, by which time over 10,000 people had entered into same-sex marriages in Massachusetts.

Following the unsuccessful effort to alter the state constitution, opponents of same-sex marriage launched a citizen petition initiative, hoping that the issue would pass the legislature with the required fifty votes and be put to a popular vote. The signature gathering process, however, became highly contentious, with allegations that the firms hired to gather signatures -- which were paid per signature -- fraud misrepresented themselves to increase their numbers, posing as supporters of a proposal to end the ban on beer and wine sales.

MassEquality received a total of 2,202 reports of fraud relating to the petition effort and quickly responded with a publicity campaign to alert the public of the allegations. Regardless of the potential irregularities, opponents of same-sex marriage gathered enough support to force a vote in the legislature. In July 2006, the referendum to ban same-sex marriage passed the state House with the more than the required fifty votes, however in the ensuing Constitutional Convention of November 2006, the legislature voted 109 to 87 to postpone the vote until the end of the legislative session. On January 2, 2007, the anti-gay amendment was defeated with a final vote of 62-134.

In order to turn back anti-gay legislation, MassEquality divided its efforts into two separate entities.

MassEquality.org worked as a 501(c)4 advocacy organization that organized people and resources to defeat anti-gay constitutional amendments. The MassEquality Educational Fund was created as a 501(c)3 charitable organization that focused on educating the public about the need for marriage protections for gay and lesbian families. MassEquality.org focused their efforts towards the legislature, legislators, and other influential people, the audience for the Educational Fund, in contrast, are the voters in Massachusetts who have yet to make up their mind about same-sex marriage.

In July 2004, another advocacy group, the Freedom to Marry Coalition, joined forces with MassEquality to

become the fiscal sponsor of the MassEquality Educational Fund. Founded in 2003 as an educational organization, Freedom to Marry was experienced in working with states to pass same-sex marriage laws and to overturn the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). Together, MassEquality and Freedom to Marry have successfully blocked attempts to pass any anti-gay legislation and have brought the issue of same-sex marriage to a broader audience.

MassEquality continues to fight for equality for the LGBT community. They have focused their efforts on equality for transgender members of the community, and protections for LGBT youth and the elderly. They continue to work to build a pro-equality majority in state legislatures and to help LGBT victims of domestic violence who are often not properly understood or addressed by traditional service organizations. The Freedom to Marry Coalition continues to work for the repeal of the federal DOMA and to bring same-sex marriage to more states.

Scope of collection

The MassEquality collection reflects the everyday operations of the coalition and its campaigns to legalize and protect same-sex marriage in Massachusetts. The collection contains organizational and administrative material, correspondence with and printed materials for legislators, legislation information and strategies to defeat anti-marriage efforts, printed materials, media and press releases, and correspondence. The collection is organized into four series, one each for organizational relating to MassEquality and the Freedom to Marry Coalition, respectively, and series for printed materials and ephemera and realia.

In addition to material from the coalition, the collection contains issues of two Boston-based gay periodicals, *Bay Windows* and *In Newsweekly*, along with press clippings from the mainstream media relevant to the fight for marriage equality; printed material from allied organizations; and a range of ephemera such as t-shirts, hats, buttons, stickers, flags, fliers, and awards.

Series descriptions

Series 1. Administration

2001-2007

The bulk of this series relates to the day-to-day operations of MassEquality. Items in this series include budget reports, volunteer and employee handbooks, schedules for various events, correspondence, memorandums, and materials pertaining to the Board of Directors. This series also contains material regarding elections and elected officials, correspondence, election materials, and voting records. Also found in this series are materials that MassEquality produced in the struggle for same-sex marriage, such as materials used in the planning of "Lobby Days" and the Constitutional Conventions. Also in this series are press releases, correspondence, fliers and other printed materials, affidavits, testimonies, and other legal documents pertaining to the various amendments that MassEquality worked to strike down.

Series 2. Freedom to Marry Coalition

1997-2008

Materials relating to the contributions the Freedom to Marry Coalition made to the fight for same-sex marriage in Massachusetts. The bulk of this series pertains to the various amendments and to various legislators and elections. Materials relating to the various amendments include plans, strategies, correspondence, and fliers and other printed material. In addition, correspondence and printed materials related to the election of many legislators are included in this series. Printed materials related to Lobby Days and Constitutional Conventions are also found in this series. In addition, materials pertaining to the running of FTM are included in this series; materials such as correspondence, memorandums, and employee and volunteer handbooks.

Series 3. Publications and Printed Material 1987-2007

Contains a large number of issues of *Bay Windows* and *In Newsweekly*, popular newspapers geared towards the LGBT community, along with clippings from the *Boston Globe*, *Metro*, and other newspapers relative to the battle for same-sex marriage, and other assorted printed materials such as invitations to a events celebrating same-sex marriage, programs for events, and fliers.

Series 4. Ephemera

2002-2007

Includes a variety of stickers, buttons, magnets, hats, and t-shirts produced by MassEquality and the Freedom to Marry Coalition, as well as flags and banners used at rallies in support of same-sex marriage, and some of the awards presented to MassEquality and FTMC in recognition of their work.

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