

To: Members of the Public Attending Hearings of
The Commission on Family Recognition and Protection
From: Tom Little, Chair
Date: February 11, 2008
Re: Format for February 11th Meeting and Hearing in Williston, Vermont

Welcome to the Commission's eighth public hearing. The Commission members are eager to listen to your testimony.

The "charge" given to the Commission is to hold public hearings around Vermont, to listen to citizens across our communities about three areas:

1. The basis for Vermont's separate legal structures for recognizing and protecting same-sex couples versus heterosexual couples.
2. The social and historical significance of the legal status of being "married" versus "joined in civil union."
3. The legal and practical challenges faced by same-sex couples joined in civil union as compared to heterosexual married couples.

The Commission also has been asked to study and assess these areas from the standpoint of our Constitution and laws.

Today, the Commission will start meeting at 5:00 with a 1 hour presentation on the background of the Civil Union law, including the Vermont Supreme Court's Baker v. State decision from late 1999, the legislative process in 2000, and the Civil Union Review Commission (which issued a report in January 2002). I will also give a synopsis of some of the testimony the Commission heard on October 29 at the Vermont Law School from four legal scholars who addressed the constitutional issues involved in the Commission's work. We hope to have time during this period to take your questions.

Starting at 6:30 pm, the Commission will take testimony. Please sign the sign-in sheet if you wish to testify. Depending on the number of persons who wish to testify, we are likely to impose a time limit of 2-3 minutes per person. You are welcome to leave your written remarks with us, to become part of the public record.

These issues stir passionate feelings. We request that your testimony be honest, open, and civil, and respectful of those who may not share your views. We also request that you not show your support of testimony by applauding, nor vocalizing your opposition to testimony.

Thank you.