

Booed Soldier and Husband Join National Marriage Campaign

Government 2012-06-12 06:23:41

Washington, DC – Freedom To Marry and Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN) today released a new online video featuring Army Captain Stephen Hill and his husband, Joshua Snyder, spotlighting the inequalities forced upon gay and lesbian service members by the so-called Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). Hill - who drew national support when he was booed during a Republican presidential debate after asking a question via video regarding repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) - recently returned from a deployment to the Middle East.

"Steve's deployment brought home to us the stark realities that gay and lesbian families face because of the Defense of Marriage Act. If something happened to me, Steve would not have been able to take emergency leave, because the military cannot recognize our relationship. If something terrible happened to him, I would not be considered the next-of-kin. Service members and their families making the kind of sacrifices that are required to serve this country shouldn't be treated as second-class citizens and their marriages shouldn't be treated as second-class marriages," said Snyder.

Hill and Snyder are also plaintiffs in landmark litigation filed in October 2011 by SLDN on behalf of eight married gay and lesbian service members and veterans challenging DOMA and other federal statutes that are being used to prevent the military from providing the same protections and support to all families.

"This lawsuit is about one thing, plain and simple. It's about equal recognition, respect, and support for all service members and their families who put their lives on the line to protect our freedoms," said Army veteran and SLDN Executive Director Aubrey Sarvis.

The video released today is the latest piece of the new Freedom to Serve, Freedom to Marry national campaign highlighting the stories of military families harmed by DOMA. In addition, SLDN and Freedom to Marry have launched a petition calling on Congress to end marriage discrimination against service members and veterans. The petition builds support for repealing so-called Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and passing the Respect for Marriage Act. "Gay and lesbian service members put their lives on the line every day to ensure the safety of Americans back home, even while the federal government continues to deny their marriages respect and their families the protections marriage brings," said Evan Wolfson, founder and President of Freedom To Marry. "It is time to repeal the so-called Defense of Marriage Act and do right by all American families, including those serving our country.

Because of the 'gay exception' created by DOMA, America's legally married gay and lesbian couples are denied more than 1,100 federal responsibilities and protections, including access to military insurance programs, Social Security survivors benefits, equal treatment under U.S. immigration laws, and the opportunity to take leave to care for a spouse.

Freedom To Marry's federal program works to repeal the so-called Defense of Marriage Act and make the case for marriage to government officials, opinion-leaders, and political operatives in Washington, DC. Freedom To Marry jointly leads the Respect for Marriage Coalition, a diverse group of nearly 75 organizations working together to repeal DOMA. Since the introduction of the Respect for Marriage Act, the number of cosponsors has increased from 18 to 32 in the Senate, including every Democratic member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and from 108 to 147 in the House of Representatives.

ABOUT FREEDOM TO MARRY: Freedom To Marry is the campaign to win marriage nationwide. We are pursuing our Roadmap to Victory by working to win the freedom to marry in more states, grow the national majority for marriage, and end federal marriage discrimination. We partner with individuals and organizations across the country to end the exclusion of same-sex couples from marriage and the protections, responsibilities, and commitment that marriage brings.

ABOUT SLDN: Service members Legal Defense Network (SLDN) is a non-partisan, non-profit, legal services and policy organization dedicated to bringing about full LGBT equality to America's military and ending all forms of discrimination and harassment of military personnel on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. SLDN provides free and direct legal assistance to service members and veterans affected by the repealed "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" law and the prior regulatory ban on open service, as well as those currently serving who may experience harassment or discrimination. Since 1993, our in-house legal team has responded to more than 11,500 requests for assistance. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender service members with questions are urged to contact the SLDN hotline to speak with a staff attorney: Call 1-800-538-7418 or 202-328-3244 x100

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WHEN : 2012-06-12 06:23:41
WHERE :

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