

organizations in Virginia, about the harmful impact this Amendment would have on many of the most vulnerable citizens among us – especially unmarried women, single parents, adoptive children, and same- sex couples.

### **Let us reason together.**

The Marshall-Newman Amendment actually adds no new incentive or protection for marriages. Nothing about it would lower our state’s high divorce rate, discourage out-of-wedlock pregnancy, or protect children from harm. In fact, its first sentence, which defines marriage, only repeats what is already Virginia law. Its second paragraph goes much further, adding these words to the Bill of Rights:

**This Commonwealth and its political subdivisions shall not create or recognize a legal status for relationships of unmarried individuals that intends to approximate the design, qualities, significance, or effects of marriage.**

If passed, this sweeping new language would tie up our courts in a long series of legal challenges, because it would throw open to legal challenge *any* local or state law that offers the “qualities” or “effects” of marriage to any two unmarried people.

### **The Amendment would treat others as we would not want to be treated ourselves.**

In Ohio and Michigan, where similar amendments were recently passed, unmarried men and women are now threatened with the loss of health benefits and legal protections.

Courts in Ohio have ruled that women whose abusers are not their husbands are no longer entitled to seek protective orders. In Virginia, 60,000 unmarried domestic violence victims seek protective orders each year.

The Amendment would also be a powerful tool for eliminating or blocking other rights and protections, including . . .

- The freedom of private businesses to offer domestic partner health benefits
- Hospital visitation rights for anyone who is not a married spouse or blood relative
- Custody rights for unmarried parents.

Taking protections away from the vulnerable—and how else can we describe terminally ill partners and adoptive children?—violates what we believe is a universal moral principle:

*Love your neighbor  
as you love yourself.*

It also violates our sense of fairness. Is it right to accept my unmarried neighbor’s support of my marriage benefits and family-law protections, through the taxes he pays, while I deny him and his children the same?

### **The Amendment would harm our state’s economic competitiveness.**

Last year, our legislature voted to let private businesses in Virginia extend health benefits to employees’ unmarried partners. That was good news for our economy, since more than half of all Fortune 500 companies, including 15 that are based in Virginia, offer domestic partner health benefits—and their number grows every year.

By threatening to block these private benefit plans, the Amendment would only encourage companies to move to neighboring states where their workplace fairness policies are welcomed. That would be bad for our state’s economic growth.

### **The Amendment violates religious freedom.**

It is often assumed, especially in political debates, that all religions agree in their basic teaching on marriage. But that is not the case today, and it has never been the case. Some denominations in Virginia recognize marriages outside their own faith, others do not. Some recognize divorce, others do not. Some allow contraception, others do not.

Only a few decades ago, many churches taught that interracial marriage was immoral. Several decades before that, many churches taught that a woman’s primary obligation was to obey her husband and, therefore, that women did not need property rights.

Today, church teachings on same-sex relationships also vary widely. Thousands of churches and synagogues across the country bless the committed unions of same-sex couples. And the number of churches and synagogues opposed to branding same-sex couples with a second-class status is even larger---and growing. This past June, as Congress was preparing to vote again on a similar, but less sweeping, federal marriage amendment, 2,300 clergy from around the country signed a petition opposing it.

**We must never write discrimination into law.**

We also believe it would set a dangerous precedent to write into our historic Bill of Rights any definition of marriage that favors one social, political or religious tradition over another. Virginia's Bill of Rights is justly famous as the first constitutional statute in history to protect religious minorities. It is a bill of *rights* because it protects each of us from being bullied by our government or by majorities of any kind. This shield within our constitution must never be used as a weapon.

**Unitarian Universalism teaches that the pursuit of equality is a moral value.**

While we are a small denomination, Unitarian Universalism is a faith tradition whose roots in America date back to the time of the Founding Fathers. In putting our faith into practice, one of our Seven Principles has been especially valuable to us:

*We believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every person.*

Unitarian Universalist leaders were among the earliest supporters of the abolitionist, women's suffrage, and civil rights movements. Three decades ago, our denomination also agreed, in a national general assembly, that every person's sexual orientation must be respected. And we agreed roughly a decade ago that same-sex couples are entitled to the normal, civil benefits of civil marriage.

GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender) individuals and couples have often found a welcoming haven in our

sanctuaries. As a result, we know the stories of their lives. The lesbian couple with a happy adoptive son, the single gay dad with two teenage kids, the man whose longtime partner is hospitalized with cancer—these people are not abstractions to us. Their families are part of our family.

Sadly, we are witnessing more of them who, fearing especially for their children's security, are uprooting themselves from jobs and communities to relocate in states that respect their rights as families. Every time this happens, our congregations—and the state of Virginia—are the poorer for it.

**Please vote *no*.**

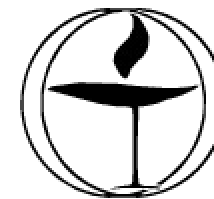
Please join us in opposing this amendment. If you agree with any of the arguments raised here, please be sure to vote on November 7, and check *no* on ballot measure number one.

**Signed--**

*Marc DeFrancis, Chair, UUCA "Vote No"  
Task Force, on behalf of the congregation;  
Rev. Michael McGee;  
Rev. Linda Olson Peebles;  
Rev. Mary McKinnon Ganz; and  
Archene Turner, Ministerial Intern*

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**Open Letter  
to the  
People of Virginia –  
From the  
Congregation  
And Clergy  
of the  
Unitarian Universalist  
Church of Arlington**

*September 2006*

**Dear Commonwealth Neighbor:**

On November 7, you will be asked to vote on Ballot Referendum Question #1, popularly known as the Marshall-Newman Amendment or the Virginia Marriage Amendment. We—the congregation and clergy of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington—respectfully ask you to consider the reasons why we plan to *vote no* on this proposed change to our state's Bill of Rights.

Our church community is concerned, as are a growing number of other faith-based