



16 June 2014

OPEN LETTER TO ALL STATES OF JERSEY STATES MEMBERS

Dear States Member

EQUAL MARRIAGE IN JERSEY – PROPOSITION BY DEPUTY SAM MÉZEC, ST.HELIER

I write on behalf of LIBERATE in support of Deputy Sam Mézec’s proposition lodged at the States Greffe on Wednesday 28 May 2014 petitioning the States of Jersey to introduce equal marriage in the Bailiwick of Jersey.

LIBERATE is the first Channel Island charity to support the islands’ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Community (LGBTQ).

Who we are

Liberate is an inclusive Group, which welcomes people irrespective of sexual orientation, gender identity, religious belief, race, gender or disability. We are a local charity and were founded on 15 February 2014 in Guernsey.

Liberate is made up of a virtual rainbow of people from every different gender and sexual identity you could possibly think of. With such a diverse background we can operate on many different levels as we all bring something different to the group.

Our vision

Our vision is simple. We believe in a Fair & Equal society, where everyone is born equal and free, and treated with dignity and respect no matter what their gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, belief or race.

Article 1 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights states:

“All people are born free & equal in dignity and rights”.

Children do not know racism, sexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, unless they are taught it and government has a responsibility to ensure that it sends a clear message to communities that discrimination in all its forms is not acceptable.

Supporting, Informing, Reforming . . . for the LGBTQ community in the islands

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Our purpose

The purpose of Liberate is to educate and inform on a wide range of issues and to support those who identify as LGBTQ, their families and friends.

We campaign to reform some of Guernsey's policies and laws to ensure that LGBTQ people can enjoy the same freedoms as everyone else in the Bailiwick of Guernsey. We also lend our support to the LGBTQ community in Jersey and are affiliated to Trans*Jersey.

We question social attitudes and behaviours which discriminate against LGBTQ people, and offer advice and help in tackling homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, etc.

Our aims

We will petition and work with government to:

1. Introduce Equal Marriage Legislation
2. Give transgender people full access to services to allow them to transition to their gender identity
3. Introduce anti-discriminatory legislation or an Equality Act which addresses homophobic, biphobic and transphobic hate crime
4. Reform laws and policies such as income tax legislation to ensure that they are non-discriminatory

Since our website www.liberate.gg was launched we have had over 1,000 signatures in support of equal marriage in the islands. We have also achieved one of our aims in Guernsey of having transgender reassignment surgery funded by the States of Guernsey. We also:

- Support the local Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning community, their families, friends and carers through a wide range of initiatives.
- Educate and inform society through outreach and Public Awareness campaigns.
- Fight to ensure that everyone is treated fairly and equally under the law, and that no-one is left behind.
- Challenge discrimination in all its forms in our daily lives, whether it is working in a voluntary capacity for Liberate, at work, socially, etc. We will not be bystanders.
- Act as Ambassadors for Equality and Diversity in our daily lives.
- Work with other organisations, charities and non-governmental organisations to promote equality and fairness in our society and facilitate positive change in social policy.

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- Respect the dignity and rights of others at all times, whether we have differences of opinion or belief, or not.

The Free & Equal Campaign

The United Nations Human Rights Commission recently launched its Free & Equal Campaign which is partly aimed at world governments to ensure that they do not actively discriminate through legislation and policy, as well as encouraging the LGBTQ community to speak out and have a voice.

The LGBTQ community have historically been persecuted, tortured and executed¹. Indeed 81 countries still classify homosexuality as a criminal offence. It is only in recent history that it was decriminalised in our society, and not until the early 1990's that the World Health Organisation declassified homosexuality as a disease. We hope that you can therefore appreciate how difficult it is for the LGBTQ community to be visible and speak out against social injustice.

Deputy Mézec's Proposition

Deputy Mézec's proposition is an important step for Jersey in ensuring that each and every one of its citizens are free and equal in dignity and rights.

Jersey recently made an important step in terms of tackling discrimination with the introduction of its Discrimination Law. We see the introduction of equal marriage in Jersey as a natural progressive step towards that goal. Failure to do so will deny approximately 10% of the population the right to marry, and be totally at odds with Jersey's current social policy in terms of discrimination.

Guernsey's Chief Minister has already assured LIBERATE that he will bring a report to the States of Guernsey before the end of this political term proposing the introduction of a Union Civile for all couples who wish to marry. Under the proposed law, it will be the choice of those getting married whether they chose to then have a blessing or humanist celebration.

We hope Jersey does the same.

The England and Wales Equal Marriage Act caused problems for transgender people over the so-called Spousal Veto. It allows their spouse to refuse to permit them to have a Gender Reassignment Certificate, which would convert the marriage from opposite-sex to same-sex. We prefer the Scottish Same Sex Marriage Law of 2014 model which overcomes that "veto".

¹ Including an estimated 100,000 LGBTQ people who were victims of the Nazi Holocaust.

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Winning Hearts and Minds

LIBERATE acknowledges that changing laws and policies is only part of the solution to changing societal attitudes towards the LGBTQ community.

Together we must win the hearts and minds of those who through ignorance, intolerance, and hatred, discriminate against various sections of our community. It is that intolerance which can divide families, friends and colleagues, and damage the very fabric of our society, with consequential harm to individuals and cost to government and other third party agencies. The LGBTQ community is widely acknowledged to be twice at risk of harm of anxiety, depression, substance misuse, self harm and suicide because of the affects that prejudicial attitudes have.

Changing laws and policies sends out a very clear signal to society of what is acceptable and what behaviours are not.

Our commitment to the States of Jersey is that we will work and co-operate with government locally in terms of ensuring that the universal principle of fairness and equality for all applies within our islands. Whether it be in changing laws and policies, or helping States departments in developing social policy strategies which promote equality and inclusion and celebrate the importance of diversity.

We ask you to vote “Pour” in favour of Deputy Mézec’s proposition.

Yours faithfully

Martin Gavet
Hon. Chairperson
LIBERATE

cc: Bailiff
Deputy Bailiff
TUC General Secretary
UN Human Rights Commissioner

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