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A look at the couples challenging Connecticut's marriage laws

Thursday August 26, 2004

Seven gay couples who were denied marriage licenses in Connecticut filed a lawsuit Wednesday challenging the constitutionality of the state's marriage laws. All seven couples applied for the licenses in Madison.

Here is a look at the couples.

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Elizabeth Kerrigan, 49, and Joanne Mock, 50, of West Hartford, have been together for 10 years and are parents of 2-year-old twin boys, Carlos and Fernando.

They adopted the boys from Guatemala two years ago and have protected their family through second parent adoption, but say they want to offer more security to their children.

"Marriage is the best way to ease our family's burdens if Jody or I face a medical crisis," Kerrigan said. "It would be hard enough to go on with life and care for the children without also dealing with the additional hardships that we would face because we're not protected by marriage."

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Carol Conklin, 51, and Janet Peck, 53, of Colchester, are preparing to celebrate their 30th anniversary in September 2005.

And they hope to be married by that time. Both women were born and raised in Connecticut and now own local businesses. Peck has a mental health counseling practice and Conklin is an electrician and home contractor.

The women say they realized firsthand how important a marriage license is when Conklin was denied access to visit Peck in intensive care after she was recovering from surgery to remove tumors from her liver.

"I'm not a stranger, Conklin said. "I'm the one who is responsible for Janet's welfare and I'm the one who knows her wishes if something were to go wrong."

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Geraldine and Suzanne Artis, of Middletown, have been together for 10 years and have three children.

Geraldine, 35, works as a recreation therapist and Suzanne, 33, teaches in a public school. They say they want to marry so they can receive all the benefits that come with a marriage license, including health and emergency care.



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``Every family needs safety," Suzanne Artis said. ``Shouldn't all committed families have equal rights?"

^ =

Stephen Davis, 52, and Jeffrey Busch, 41, moved to Busch's hometown of Wilton in 1997. There, they have built a family with the addition of their 2-year-old son Elijah.

Davis runs the digital library program at Columbia University, where he has worked since 1988, and Busch is an administrative judge and part-time legal services lawyer in New York City.

Busch, who now only works part time, cannot share in Davis' Social Security without a marriage license.

``We're not housemates," Davis said. ``We're a responsible family and want the law to see us that way, too."

^ =

J.E. Martin, 42, and Denise Howard, 47, of Stratford, have been a couple for 14 years and are parents of 7-year-old Rachel and 4-year-old Ross.

The women say they have felt the harsh consequences of not having a marriage license. When Howard was laid off from work, she was forced to buy health benefits, and Martin is concerned about whether her company pension will be available to support Howard after her death.

Martin has worked for General Electric for 20 years, and Howard is an account representative for HealthNet.

``We eat together, go on walks together, do homework together and argue about bed times," Howard said. ``But our family does not have the protections and recognition that come with marriage."

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John Anderson, 61, and Garrett Stack, 57, of Woodbridge, have been together for 24 years.

Both men have spent their careers in education. Stack spent 35 years as a teacher and then school administrator, recently retiring after 12 years as the principal of Franklin Elementary School.

Anderson will soon enter his 20th year teaching Latin at Stratford's Bunnell High School.

The men say they wish to share their retirement money as any other married couple would.

``We're getting older and as we become more vulnerable physically, it is even more important to us to have the financial and legal security that only marriage brings," Anderson said.

^ =

Barbara and Robin Levine-Ritterman, of New Haven, have been together since 1989 and are the parents of 9-year-old Maya and 7-year-old Joshua.

Barbara was diagnosed with breast cancer in June and has gone through surgery and chemotherapy. Robin says she now realizes how vulnerable her family is without the legal protections of marriage.

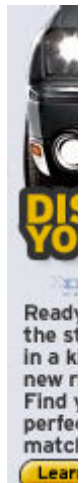
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They have already taken financial and legal steps to merge their assets.

Robin is a naturopathic physician and acupuncturist and Barbara owns a computer business.

“We want to marry as the natural expression of our love and commitment,” Robin Levine-Ritterman said. “We also want our children to grow up with the security provided to a legally married family.”

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In the interest of timeliness, this story is fed directly from the newswire and may contain occasional typographical errors.

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