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### **In Defense of Senate Bill 199**

Good morning Madam Chair. I, Rev. F. Vernon Wright V, present this testimony as a Christian minister of Plymouth Congregational Church, United Church of Christ and urge you to support this legislation. I am a happily married heterosexual man, with three children. Opponents of this bill tell you that legislation defining homosexual orientation as a category like race or gender deserving of protection will run counter to Christian values. But I would argue that a) Christian values are not consistent from denomination to denomination, so you need to ask whose Christian values are you talking about, b) the Bible never dealt with sexual orientation but rather, sexual behavior, and never address the issue we are talking at all- the *in-utero* or even genetic predisposition to be attracted to the same sex. c) the language of the Gospel- the teachings of Christ himself- as well as the spirit of Paul's letters seem to promote compassion and love for those reviled by society rather than condemnation and finger pointing, and would support the rights of those inclined to monogamous gay or lesbian relationships.

Which Christian value does this fear of Gays and Lesbians come from?

While I can certainly articulate the Christian Values of the United Church of Christ, my own denomination, I am reasonably certain that they are not all the same as those shared by the Vatican or by the Southern Baptist Convention. I know for certain that they are not the same values promoted by the Westborough Baptist Church of Topeka Kansas. As Churches we

have vastly different views on the status of scripture, the roll of the church, and the meaning of sacrament. Most of the Christian community are not even in communion with one another. My own denomination, the founders of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, Fisk, was the first in America to recognize the rights of Blacks Women, Gays, Lesbians and the trans-gendered. In covenant with God, one another, and upholding the principles of our Christian values, we do not allow our churches to discriminate, and as citizens of this great nation would prefer that secular institutions not be allowed to either.

Now that I have raised this issue of differing Christian values in regards to sexual orientation, I want to examine this whole issue of sexual orientation from the perspective of the Bible and modern science. I maintain that the bible does not address this issue of homosexual orientation in the modern understanding of these things. The Hebrew and the Greek words used to describe homosexuality, were descriptive. The Levitical code found in Leviticus and parts of Exodus and Deuteronomy lays out as a law that a man should not sleep with a man as with a woman. Fine. But if you follow this one you better follow all the rest. Leviticus 25:44 sanctions the purchase and ownership of slaves as long as they are acquired from neighboring nations. Exodus 21: 7 states that it is permissible to sell one's daughter into slavery. Exodus 35:2 states that if someone works on the Sabbath (Saturday) they should be put to death. Leviticus 11:6-8 claims that if one touches a dead pig (ham) they are unclean and can't enter the sanctuary for a week. Paul says that homosexuality- here *arsenocoites* is wrong, but what he is referring to is the Greek practice of Pederasty, or the practice a teacher owning the bodies of his boy students. This is exploitive behavior is not the

same as two men or women, after trying their whole lives to be heterosexual, being unable to hide from who they truly are and seeking a stable, monogamous relationship.

Natural scientists have found homosexuality among mammals, birds, and insects. Scientific studies have also proven that there are differences in male sexuality, depending on the amount of testosterone a fetus receives from its mother in utero. For instance, there was a much higher rate of homosexuality in male infants born during war time in Poland...later studies showed that because of stress, the pregnant mothers were unable to secrete normal amounts of testosterone to their fetuses in utero. Now obviously choice is important- as is with the natural inclination of heterosexuality, homosexuality can be abusive and sinful. But one's inborn characteristics- one's innate nature, being of the image of God is not.

So we have raised the issue of diversity of Christian values, and examined the biblical and scientific understanding of homosexuality, let's look at what the Good news of Christ- i.e. the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John say about homosexuality. Nothing! Absolutely nothing! Jesus does say a great deal criticizing Heterosexual lust, hypocrisy, greed, things I don't see to many churches jumping up and down about. He does talk a lot about being present to the least- and folks- despite what you see in Hollywood, being gay or lesbian in a society that so highly values heterosexuals is quite a cross to bear. He does talk about not judging your neighbor; he does talk about loving God with all of one's being loving your neighbor as your self, and loving even your enemy. Folks, do you love by excluding other people, by saying it's okay to single out a whole category of people and target them

for acts of hate by the nature of that category? I think not. To allow a society to do such a thing would run entirely counter to what Jesus would have done. Let us not by straining out this gnat swallow a camel.

When Theologian John Robinson sent the congregational Pilgrims off to the new world he told them to be careful about being overly zealous about their faith, as he said, "For I am sure that God hath yet more truth, and more light to shed on this Gospel of ours." The living God revealed in the Gospel is still speaking- it is not confined to antique cosmology or material understanding of the universe- and so in light of this light which you are as professing Christians I would encourage you, on account Christian values, on account of the historical context of the Bible, on account of the living God revealed in the Gospel, to back senate bill 199.