

Marriage amendment not right, leaders say: From three mainline denominations

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Leaders from three mainline Protestant churches deeply divided over homosexuality have opposed a proposed constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage, telling Congress that it would force all churches to accept only one definition of marriage. The Washington offices of the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America joined 23 other religious bodies in a letter to lawmakers that said an amendment would restrict a church's ability to bless gay unions if it chose to do so.

"It is not the task of our government and elected representatives to enshrine in our laws the religious point of view of any one faith," they said collectively in the June 3 letter. "Rather, our government should dedicate itself to protecting the rights of all citizens and all faiths." Other signators included Quakers, Sikhs, the Interfaith Alliance, the American Jewish Committee, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ's Justice and Witness Ministries.

Several of the signers—the gay-oriented Metropolitan Community Churches, Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism and the Unitarian Universalist Association—already allow their clergy to officiate at gay unions, including gay civil marriages in Massachusetts.

The letter is significant because many of the groups that signed it have not taken official positions on gay marriage or the proposed amendment. Other groups, including Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox and conservative evangelical groups, have pushed hard for the amendment.

Karen Vagley, director of the Lutherans' government affairs office, said the letter was not a statement about homosexuality or even gay marriage, but reflected the church's concern for civil rights. "All of our positions and statements are based on

policy statements that have been approved by the church body," she said. "This is a civil rights issue, and our social statement is very clear on civil rights." -*Religion News Service*