

BY CHUCK COLBERT

It was an unmistakable show of support, political force, and in fact stepped-up public advocacy, as up to a thousand gay marriage proponents gathered inside the main hall of the Massachusetts Statehouse Jan. 8.

Directed primarily at legislators, their pro-gay messages — political, legal, faith-based, and personal — rang out loud and clear: civil marriage is not religious marriage; no anti-gay amendment to the state's constitution; civil unions do not equal civil marriage; separate and unequal does not work.

"Rallies are great," said Cambridge resident Sue Hyde, spokesperson for MassEquality.org, the organization that sponsored the event. "But 1,000 people is not enough. We need thousands more people to contact their state representatives and senators. No anti-gay amendment to the constitution — no ifs, ands, or buts."

Added Newton resident Holly Gunner, a member of the MassEquality executive committee, "Even better is for everybody to call five family members and friends. Ask them to call their legislators. It's easy, just call the Statehouse switchboard at 617-722-2000." Gunner represents the state branch of the American Civil Liberties Union.

MassEquality.org is the local umbrella organization of more than 15 local and national organizations, assembled to protect the Nov. 18 civil marriage decision of the state's Supreme Judicial Court (SJC).

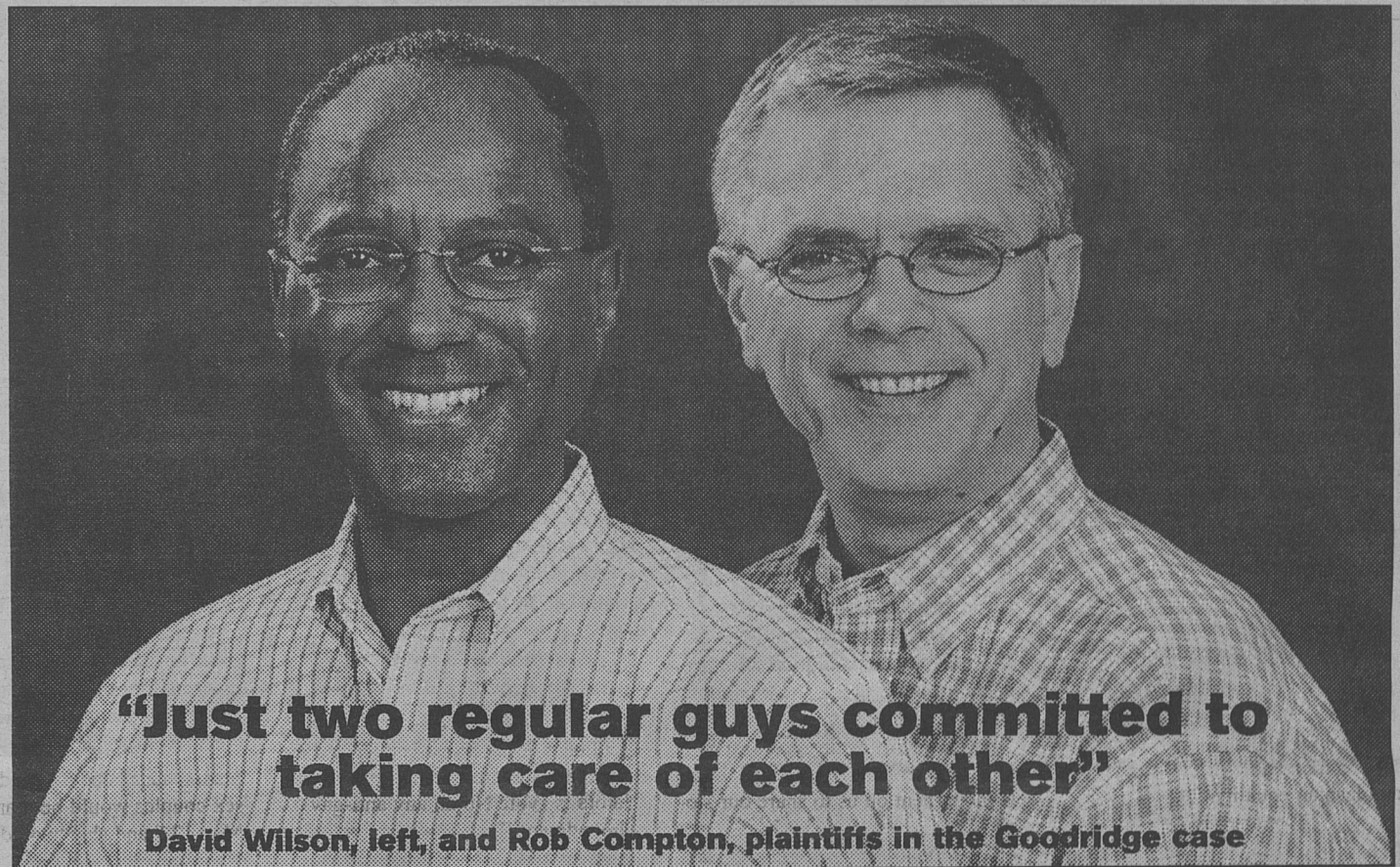
MassEquality.org's immediate focus is to prevent the Legislature from placing on the ballot an anti-gay marriage constitutional amendment. Gay advocates fear that passage of such an amendment, in any form, would roll back one of the most historic achievements in gay civil rights history, marking the first time in the nation that a state's highest court gave gay same-sex couples the green light to wed under civil law.

The rally came a day after gay marriage's detractors from the Coalition for Marriage held their own media event. The event attracted 200 people, Boston media reported.

Nevertheless, at the pro-gay event, nearly a dozen of the state's leading Democratic legislators and party officials lined up behind gay community leaders and advocates.

One speaker, president-elect M. Ellen Carpenter of the Massachusetts Bar Association, told the gathering, "There is no ambiguity," in what the SJC said. "The Massachusetts constitution requires that same-sex couples be granted marriage licenses," she explained. "This has to do with civil marriages and has nothing to do with couples walking down the aisles of churches, synagogues, mosques, or any other religious institution."

Other speakers represented faith communities associated with the Religious Coalition for the Freedom to Marry ([www.rcfm.org](http://www.rcfm.org)), including the Episcopal priest Rev. George



## FROM THE FRONT LINES

### At the Massachusetts Statehouse rally, message on marriage made clear

Wells and Rev. Virginia Ann McDaniel, pastor of Christ Church United in Lowell.

Wells said that the three Episcopal bishops of Massachusetts "join hands across the commonwealth" with justice-seeking brothers and sisters "in support of the fundamental human right to marry persons they so choose." Wells also said in a pointed reference to Catholic rhetoric, "They need to have their mouths washed out with soap."

He added, "This is really as fundamental a right to life issue as any, the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Rev. McDaniel explained that the United Church of Christ, the oldest and largest Protestant denomination in Massachusetts, already blesses same-sex couples but that the state does not recognize those marriages under civil law.

"We wrestled with the meaning of marriage and concluded that its essence is a covenant committed of love and faithfulness between two people, grounded in God's love," she said.

"There was nothing abstract or hypothetical about our decision; two very active members of the church — a lesbian couple —

quite matter of factly requested that I marry them ... just as any other couple would," McDaniel explained.

"But while it was extremely important to these two women to have their marriage recognized by their community of faith, their ceremony did not confer any of the benefits or protections that a heterosexual couple would automatically be granted," she said. "This is first and foremost a matter of justice."

Two sets of plaintiff couples in the case that led to the SJC's decision also addressed the rally and lobbying effort, including David Wilson and Robert Compton and Hillary and Julie Goodridge.

"The response has been overwhelming," said Compton. "We don't consider ourselves to be activists. We're just two regular guys who are baby boomers rapidly approaching retirement. We are committed to taking care of each other. ... All we are asking for is the same marriage rights as other couples have so that we can do that as we grow older together."

Julie and Hillary Goodridge told about flowers they received on the day of the SJC decision from a minister in Sante Fe, N.M., including a card that said, "Hooray for love."

Hillary Goodridge spoke of her struggle to be by Julie's side in the hospital. "I had to fight. I had to cry. And I had to lie to be by her side," she said.

Hillary Goodridge went on to speak about other reactions on Nov. 18, the day of the Court's landmark decision. "What I was unprepared for the most was the tears," she said. "All day long, people cried, grown men, grown women, young people, teachers, doctors, firefighters, electricians, engineers, lawyers, little league coaches — all crying."

She added, "We cried for happiness. We cried because after years, for some decades of being denied and excluded, we knew that we no longer would have to fight and to cry and to lie — to be by each other's sides." ▼

*Chuck Colbert writes for In Newsweekly, where this story originally ran.*