

The Umali-Behrens Family

July 31, 2012

Dear Members of Congress,

On June 23, 2012, we were joined together as a family in a civil union ceremony at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey. Will, who is a civilian and a financial manager for Robert Half International, has two children, an 11 year-old and a 9 year-old. Erwynn, who is an Air Force Technical Sergeant and a Professional Military Education Instructor, has an 11 year-old and a 9 year old, as well.

Once we knew that the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell would occur, we inquired as to what we needed to do to have our ceremony held on base, where we are stationed. The chapel staff quickly moved into action and was very helpful and consistently communicated with us regarding progress. We were soon informed that we had received approval and that a military Chaplain would be able to perform the ceremony.

But our happiness about this union is coupled with frustration, and yes, a little sadness. Unfortunately, because of the so-called Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), our newly joined family of six is not recognized by the military nor offered the same support and benefits that other military families are granted. Among our most pressing concerns are:

- We must provide separate health insurance for both Will and his children. We are sure that you are aware of the rising health care costs, and this puts a great financial strain on our new family.
- Our entire family is not able to gain access to base, commissary and exchange, because they are not granted military ID cards.
- We are also not offered the military death gratuity and pension. God forbid, if something were to happen to Erwynn on duty, Will would not receive the military death gratuity and pension benefit that is afforded to other married couples – and that he would need to help care for our children.
- We are not afforded the housing benefits that other military couples and families are given once they get married, nor are we allowed to obtain base military housing.

And while these concerns are significant, sometimes it's the smaller, day-to-day indignities that are so hard to bear. For example, Will and the kids recently threw a surprise birthday party for Erwynn, but in order to do so, they had to find someone on base to come to the gate and escort them – but only after being forced to fill out paperwork. No other family would be forced to do this.

We strongly feel that we should be afforded the same recognition, support, and benefits as all other military families. We equally support and make sacrifices for the freedom and security of our country. We hope you will hear this plea and take whatever action is necessary to correct this injustice forced upon us – and so many others like us – by laws which treat us differently.

Sincerely,

Will & Erwynn Umali-Behrens
Married 2012