



NATIONAL CENTER FOR LESBIAN RIGHTS

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**Note:** Additional press materials, including photos, available at <http://eqfl.org/pressprep>

**NCLR Case Page:** [http://www.nclrights.org/cases-and-policy/cases-and-advocacy/pareto\\_v\\_rubin](http://www.nclrights.org/cases-and-policy/cases-and-advocacy/pareto_v_rubin)

## **Six Same-sex Couples and Equality Florida Institute File Lawsuit Seeking the Freedom to Marry in Florida**

(Miami, FL, January 21, 2014)—Today, six same-sex couples and Equality Florida Institute are filing a lawsuit in Florida state court in Miami seeking the freedom to marry. The lawsuit argues that Florida's laws barring same-sex couples from marriage violate the United States Constitution by denying them the legal protections and equal dignity that having the freedom to marry provides.

The couples are from Miami and the surrounding area. Four of the couples are raising children, and another couple has an adult child and two grandchildren. The couples are: Catherina Pareto and Karla Arguello; Dr. Juan Carlos Rodriguez and David Price; Vanessa and Melanie Alenier; Todd and Jeff Delmay; Summer Greene and Pamela Faerber; and Don Price Johnston and Jorge Isaias Diaz. They are represented by the law firm Carlton Fields Jordan Burt, attorney Elizabeth F. Schwartz, attorney Mary B. Meeks and the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR).

Said Pareto: "Florida is our home, it is where we are raising our child, and where we want to get married. Karla and I wish for our family the same things that other families want. We want to build our lives together, provide a safe and caring home for our child, and share in the responsibilities and protections of marriage."

Added Greene: "As Pam and I get older, it worries me that we do not have the legal protections that marriage provides in case one of us becomes ill or dies. Getting married in Florida will provide us with those important protections and it will allow us to celebrate that joyous occasion with all our family and friends, just as other couples can."

Stated Equality Florida Institute Chief Executive Officer Nadine Smith: "Today the majority of Floridians stand with us as we take this historic step toward marriage equality in the Sunshine State. These couples have been embraced by their families and communities, but every day, Florida laws are denying them the protections and dignity that every family deserves. These harmful laws are outdated and out of step. It is time for all families in our state to have full equality under the law."

Attorney Cristina Alonso of Carlton Fields Jordan Burt added: "Courts throughout the country are recognizing that this is an issue of basic dignity and fundamental fairness. We look forward to the day when our clients can celebrate and protect their relationships by getting married in their home state in front of family and friends."

Said attorney Elizabeth F. Schwartz: "As someone who has spent nearly two decades helping same-sex couples and their families achieve some measure of legal protection under Florida law, which gives us very few tools, I know too well just how difficult the process can be and how much vulnerability these couples face. The protections we are able to cobble together without marriage pale in comparison to the comprehensive security provided by marriage recognized not just by the federal government but by the State of Florida."

NCLR Legal Director Shannon Minter added: "The law should support families, not make it harder for committed couples to support one another and protect their children. Barring same-sex couples from marriage causes great harms to their families and children while helping no one."

### **About the Plaintiffs**

#### **Catherina Pareto and Karla Arguello**

Catherina Pareto and Karla Arguello have been together for 14 years. Catherina owns and operates a financial planning firm. Karla is a stay-at-home mother to their 15-month-old son.

#### **Dr. Juan Carlos Rodriguez and David Price**

Dr. Juan Carlos Rodriguez and David Price have been together for nearly 18 years. Juan Carlos is a physician specializing in pulmonary medicine. David is the practice manager for Juan Carlos's medical practice. They have twins, a boy and a girl, who are three years old.

Said Juan Carlos: "David and I are devoted to our children. We are a family in every way, except that Florida will not allow us to marry. Being a doctor, I see people and families in crisis all the time. In those situations, family and the legal protections that come with it are critical. It pains David and me to be denied a basic safety net of legal protections."

#### **Vanessa and Melanie Alenier**

Vanessa and Melanie Alenier have been together for eight years. Vanessa is the assistant general manager of a national trade show and special event service provider. Melanie is an insurance agent. They have a 5-year-old son together.

Said Vanessa: "Melanie and I have worked so hard to build and protect our family, but nothing can come close to matching the protections that marriage provides. Our family is in need of those protections just like other families. We want our son to understand that his family is secure and just as respected as any other family part of our community here in Florida."

#### **Todd and Jeff Delmay**

Todd and Jeff Delmay have been together for 11 years. Todd and Jeff own and operate Delmay and Partners, a company that provides housing services for large events. They have one son, who is three years old.

Said Jeff: "Like all parents, making sure that our son is safe and secure is our top priority. Unfortunately, because the State of Florida will not allow us to get married we cannot provide the level of protections that opposite-sex married couples are able to give to their children. Beyond those critical protections, we want the opportunity to celebrate our love and commitment to one another in a wedding ceremony and have it mean something, which the state is currently denying us."

#### **Summer Greene and Pamela Faerber**

Summer Greene and Pamela Faerber have been together for 25 years. Summer is a real estate agent. Pamela is a portrait artist. Summer and Pamela raised Pamela's daughter from a prior marriage and now have two grandchildren, ages 10 and 17.

#### **Don Price Johnston and Jorge Isaias Diaz**

Don Price Johnston and Jorge Isaias Diaz have been in a committed relationship for a year and recently got engaged. Don is an office manager at a Miami law firm, and Jorge is a paralegal at a Miami law firm.

Said Jorge: "Both Don and I have very strong ties to Florida and cannot imagine getting married anywhere else. If we could marry, we would be legally recognized as a family and have all the same legal protections as others."

### **Equality Florida Institute**

Equality Florida Institute is the state's largest civil rights organization dedicated to securing full equality for Florida's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community. The organization has many members throughout the state. Since its inception, the organization has represented the interests of LGBT Floridians through public education, coalition-building, advocacy and grassroots organizing. Equality Florida Institute also coordinates public education campaigns and events for policymakers, LGBT people, and the public at large on issues affecting the LGBT community. Equality Florida Institute members include many same-sex couples who long for the freedom to marry and would marry in Florida if Florida law permitted them to do so.

**Spanish speakers also available for interviews.**