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**MASSACHUSETTS ATTORNEY GENERAL MARTHA COAKLEY TO DELIVER
KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT MLGBA ANNUAL DINNER**

CAMBRIDGE – Tonight, Massachusetts Attorney General Martha Coakley will present the keynote address at the Massachusetts Lesbian & Gay Bar Association's 22nd Annual Dinner held at the Royal Sonesta Hotel in Cambridge.

The Massachusetts Lesbian & Gay Bar Association is a voluntary state-wide professional association of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender lawyers that provides a visible LGBT presence in the Massachusetts legal community. The theme of the 22nd Annual Dinner, "The Future Is Now," reflects the feeling among members of the Massachusetts LGBT community working to preserve marriage equality, that their efforts now will shape the future. In addition to Attorney General Martha Coakley's remarks awards will be presented to individuals for their commitment to public service and furthering the causes of the LGBT community. Expected in attendance are members of the MLGBA.

Attorney General Martha Coakley remains committed to protecting the rights and equality of all citizens in the Commonwealth. AG Coakley fully supports the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court's decision in Goodridge and access for civil marriage for gays and lesbians in the Commonwealth. As Attorney General, Coakley will continue to work with advocates to ensure that the rights of same-sex couples to marry are protected.

The MLGBA 22nd Annual Dinner is scheduled to start at 5:30 p.m. Attorney General Coakley is expected to deliver the keynote address at approximately 7:30 p.m. The event will be held at the Royal Sonesta Hotel in Cambridge.

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THE FUTURE IS NOW

Remarks of Massachusetts Attorney General Martha Coakley MGLBA Dinner – May 11, 2007

Thanks MGLBA co-chairs Christina Miller and Chic Wagner, and party planners extraordinaire Lisa Wilson and Tony Wright, for giving me the opportunity to talk to you this evening.

I am very pleased to be here this evening, as a lawyer and as Attorney General for this great Commonwealth. And I am honored to be in this room, among some of the great advocates who have worked so tirelessly and fearlessly to bring such monumental, positive change to our state. Much of it has not been easy, and it is not done. Even hard won protection of civil rights can never be taken for granted -- look no further than the Supreme Court's decision in Gonzales v. Planned Parenthood, a challenge to choice rights ensured under Roe v. Wade. I recognize the great strides that have been made to insure greater civil rights and protections for members of the LGBT community. I have supported those efforts, and will continue to as Attorney General.

Access to civil marriage for gays and lesbians is the law of the Commonwealth. I applaud now, as I did at the time, the Supreme Judicial Court's decision in Goodridge. And as your Attorney General, charged with responsibility for upholding the law, I will do whatever I can to see that the rights of same-sex couples to marry is protected. I am also personally committed to that.

Three years ago this month, the first civil marriage licenses were given to same-sex couples in Massachusetts. Since then, over 8500 couples have married.

Remarkably enough, and much to the chagrin of those who want to deny equal treatment to same-sex couples, the sky has not fallen and life goes on. Rather, the institution of marriage is alive and well in the Commonwealth. It has been made more inclusive. It has been nearly a seamless integration of an ancient institution with the modern (but welcome) recognition of the reality of the diversity of sexual orientation, and it has made our state stronger.

We have already seen its benefit. Couples who have been together for many years, and couples who are just now making a commitment to one another, have exercised their right to have that union recognized by the state. These same-sex couples and their children and families now have the protections, safeguards, stability, and responsibility that the state confers on heterosexual couples who choose to commit. Some argue that allowing same gender couples to marry will do harm to children; there is no evidence of that. If anything, children raised by same-sex couples greatly benefit from the possibilities Goodridge opened up.

Those in the gay community say, rightfully so, that “we are neighbors, we work together, we raise our families together, we go to school together, we serve in parent teacher organizations together, serve on local police and fire departments together, and vote and pay our taxes together. We are all part of the same social, economic and political fabric that makes up our communities and our Commonwealth. And we all have, and should continue to have, the same right to stand equal before the law and be married.” I agree with that, and look forward to the time when everyone in the Commonwealth agrees with that.

There are those, particularly those outside of this state, who are biased and threatened by gay marriage and, who want to undo this progress. We must do everything we can to avoid this because our future is now: we want our future to progress, not regress and go backward. And it is why we want to try and ensure that when the Legislature reconvenes, it rejects this anti-gay, anti-marriage amendment. It can and should do it on the merits and end this debate once and for all.

We also know that if the proposed amendment goes on the ballot, Massachusetts will spend the next year and a half besieged by anti-gay activists and will be the recipient of zealous rhetoric and invective from across the country. If that battle is necessary, you have my support.

This is a critical time in the Commonwealth’s history. You as lawyers know that our state constitution is the oldest in the country and that it provided the framework for the U.S. Constitution. In all of its 225 plus years in existence, neither the Commonwealth’s nor the US Constitution has ever been an instrument of discrimination and we shouldn’t start now.

At least two justices of the Supreme Judicial Court have raised substantial questions as to whether such an amendment, if it ultimately were placed on the ballot and passed, is even constitutional. In the Schulman case, Justice Greaney, joined by Justice Ireland, wrote:

“... the Goodridge decision may be irreversible because of its holding that no rational basis exists, or can be advanced, to support the definition of marriage proposed by the initiative and the fact that the Goodridge holding has become part of the fabric of the equality and liberty guarantees of our Constitution. If the initiative is approved by the Legislature and ultimately adopted, there will be time enough, if an appropriate lawsuit is brought, for this court to resolve the question whether our Constitution can be home to provisions that are apparently mutually inconsistent and irreconcilable. We may then give careful consideration ... to the legal tenability and implications of embodying a provision into our Constitution that would look so starkly out of place in the Adams Constitution, when compared with the document's elegantly stated, and constitutionally defined, protections of liberty, equality, tolerance, and the access of all citizens to equal rights and benefits.”

I think we can easily anticipate that if the proposed amendment was successful, there would be protracted, hard-fought litigation about the constitutionality of such a provision. If that battle is necessary, you have my support.

I believe it would be a travesty to let the oldest constitution in the country, a constitution authored by John Adams and one which has such a proud tradition of championing and expanding civil rights for people in the Commonwealth, to now be used to take away rights for a segment of the population.

Nine years after Matthew Shepard was left to die on a fence post in Wyoming, members of the GLBT community still remain at risk for discrimination in schools, employment and in places of public accommodation, as well as being targets of violent hate crimes. We cannot allow hate to occupy any legal space in Massachusetts. We cannot legislate hate away, but we can hold those accountable who act upon it and that's why it is important to develop and implement effective civil rights programs in our schools.

The Constitutional Convention is a month away. It is my hope that the proposed marriage amendment is defeated in the legislative process. I strongly encourage our legislators to defeat it and to close the door once and for all on prejudice and unequal treatment. I believe that they can vote consistently with their own consciences and the will of the public, as they do on almost every other issue they face everyday, to say they will not pass a statute with no rational basis and which would limit or curtail rights which are guaranteed today by our constitution. I know all of you will stay actively involved. I encourage you and your colleagues, neighbors and friends, to write and call your legislators and ask them to work to defeat this unwise and discriminatory amendment.

It is a simple matter of fairness, equality and respect for human dignity; it is a matter of civil rights.

Thank you.