



**Testimony of Kimberly McCullough, Legislative Director
In Support of HB 3483
House Committee on Rules
March 23, 2015**

Chair Hoyle and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments in support of HB 3483, which would add secular organizations, individuals authorized by secular organizations, and the parties to a marriage to the list of person and entities authorized to solemnize marriages in Oregon.

Under current Oregon law, marriages may be solemnized by a judicial officer, a county clerk, religious congregations or organizations, and clergypersons authorized by religious congregations or organizations. For those Oregonians who are members of a church and want to have a religious wedding, the law creates no impediment to the wedding ceremony of their choice.

However, many Oregonians do not belong to a particular church and wish to be married by a mentor, a spiritual advisor unaffiliated with a church, someone who has provided particular support and guidance for their relationship, or another person with particular importance to the parties to the marriage. If that particular person is not a judicial officer, a county clerk, or a clergyperson, they must seek authority from a church in order to solemnize the marriage.

This means that atheists, agnostics, and non-church-going individuals of various faiths must seek authority from a church that they do not belong to and whose beliefs they do not necessarily ascribe to in order to officiate a wedding.¹ In addition, individuals who wish to have a secular wedding officiated by someone who is not a judicial officer or county clerk must be married by someone who has been authorized to do so by a religious organization. Similarly, secular organizations are unable to perform marriage ceremonies due to their secular nature.

This differential treatment—of churches, church members and church officials, on the one hand, and secular organizations, atheists, agnostics, and non-church going individuals of various faiths, on the other—is inconsistent with Article I, sections 2, 3, and 20 of the Oregon Constitution.² In addition, the impediment placed between particular individuals and the marriage ceremony of their choice intrudes on individual autonomy and deeply personal decisions related to the fundamental right to marry.

For these reasons, we urge you to support HB 3483. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

¹ Commonly, authority to officiate weddings is obtained from the Universal Life Church:
<http://www.ulchq.com/>.

² See, e.g., *Newport Church of Nazarene v. Hensley*, 335 Or 1, 56 P3d 386 (2002) (“[I]t is impermissible for a statute to draw a distinction between churches and nonchurch religious organizations.”).