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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### COMMUNITY LEADERS STAND IN SUPPORT OF EQUALITY ILLINOIS The organization announces strategic plans post civil-unions

**CHICAGO** - Equality Illinois, the state's largest organization advocating for full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people, began the process of announcing its strategic priorities in the wake of civil unions' passage.

This morning, CEO Bernard Cherkasov and Board President Jeremy Gottschalk briefed community leaders and key stakeholders on the organization's assertive plan for moving forward in the calendar year 2011. The plan includes strategies for education and empowering the LGBT community on civil unions, on building bridges with our allies, and on protecting newly-passed civil unions from possible attacks. Aside from civil unions, the plan will focus on transgender equality, on partnerships with communities of color, and on outreach to communities of faith, among other issues.

"Passing civil unions was a victory long-fought and hard-won, but we cannot rest on those laurels," - said Bernard Cherkasov, CEO of Equality Illinois. "We will continue to fight hard to protect them, and we will continue our focus on transgender equality, on discrimination issues, and on other issues. EQIL will continue, as always, to be a strong independent organization."

The organization announced a strong showing of support from funders and donors of the LGBT equality movement. Among the new grants, Equality Illinois received a grant for \$100,000 from Gill Foundation and State Equality Fund.

"The strong showing of support from funders and donors is an endorsement of our organization's direction," - said Jeremy Gottschalk, Board of Directors President. "Particularly, the State Equality Fund grant from the Gill Foundation is a seal of approval for Equality Illinois' vision and mission."

The organization also announced the transition of Rick Garcia from Equality Illinois. "Rick is a passionate advocate who has done a great deal for our movement, and we wish him every success in his future endeavors," - said Bernard Cherkasov.

Community leaders responded positively to Equality Illinois' direction, expressing unequivocal support for the organization's plans and strategic approach.

"On behalf of Lambda Legal, we are sincerely grateful for all the amazing things Rick Garcia has accomplished for the LGBT community in Illinois. Lambda Legal has had a strong working relationship with Equality Illinois since they began, and we're confident that it will continue as we move into the important work ahead in implementing civil unions and ensuring that Illinois continues to advance our full equality" -said **Jim Bennett**, Midwest Regional Director of Lambda Legal.

"Equality Illinois has set forth an ambitious agenda for 2011 and with an expansion of its work with in the broader LGBT and ally community the organization will certainly be successful," said **Mary Morten**, former mayoral liaison and Planned Parenthood PAC board member.

"A strategy on protecting every aspect of Civil Unions is something that needs to be done collaboratively and I am glad there is a policy driven team in place to do it, along with a strong integrated commitment from all corners of the community," said **State Representative Sara Feigenholtz**.

"Equality Illinois has outlined a strong vision for moving forward and has a strong team in place to accomplish it. I look forward to working with EQIL on this." **Ann Hilton Fisher**, Executive Director of AIDS Legal Council of Chicago.

"Equality Illinois has made great strides under the direction of Board Chairman Jeremy Gottschalk and Chief Executive Officer Bernard Cherkasov. Their vision for the future of the organization and their 2011 education program represent a solid approach to effecting change throughout the state to secure full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. I look forward to working with their new Policy Director in the coming year," said **Clark Pellett**

"With its rich history of advocacy for the equal rights of the LGBT community and its most recent success in securing rights for all of us in Illinois, we are confident in Equality Illinois and its leadership and its vision for the future - a bright future indeed for the LGBT community and all of Illinois. We proudly stand by Equality Illinois as it has stood by us and our community and look forward to working together to promote the health and wellness of our shared community, including securing equal rights and equal access to quality healthcare for all." **Jamal M. Edwards**, JD, President & CEO of Howard Brown