

LEVI STRAUSS & CO.

Case Study: Advocating Equal Rights to Marriage

Levi Strauss & Co. (LS&Co.) has a long and rich history of supporting equal rights for all people. We integrated our factories prior to the civil rights movement and were the first Fortune 500 company to provide full medical benefits to domestic partners of employees. In the same spirit, in 2007, we took a leadership position by filing an *amicus curiae* brief, or “friend of the court” brief, with the California Supreme Court in support of same-sex marriage. The *amicus* brief argued that eliminating discriminatory marriage laws would enhance the ability of California businesses to recruit and retain talented employees as well as the state’s reputation for respect and diversity. Although we encouraged several other organizations to join the *amicus* brief, in the end we were the only private-sector company to sign on.

After the filing, LS&Co. representatives began engaging other California business leaders. As a result, the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce decided to support marriage rights for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community and to endorse the arguments we put forth in the *amicus* brief. In May 2008, the Court decided the case in favor of marriage equality, and same-sex couples were able to legally marry in the State of California.

Shortly after the case was decided, a group opposed to same-sex marriage introduced Proposition 8, a ballot initiative that would remove the right of same-sex couples to marry, essentially overturning the California Supreme Court’s decision. We immediately took a position opposing the ballot initiative, and became involved in discussions early on with “No on Prop 8” campaign leaders. Together with Pacific Gas and Electric Company, we signed on as co-chair of the Equality Business Council on “No on Prop 8” and actively pursued other companies to join this effort.

Major California-based and out-of-state companies, including Apple, AT&T, Time Warner, and Viacom, also announced their opposition to Prop 8. As a result of our early advocacy and persistence through the ballot initiative process, the business case for marriage equality has been clearly defined, and other major corporations have voiced public support for their LGBT employees and other stakeholders.

LS&Co. has taken a public policy lead in supporting same-sex marriage, contributing to our company’s legacy as a strong supporter of nondiscrimination and diversity in the workplace. We also have advocated for passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) and the Domestic Partnership Tax Equity Act. Our advocacy efforts related to equity in general and progressive employment practices will help to win equality for all.