

Nancy Brink and Maria Perez



Nancy (left) and Maria

“We already live under a state constitutional amendment blocking any recognition of our relationships. We’re working that out here in Nebraska, and it will take some time to see whether our extreme law will stand. We’re locked out in the cold here, and an amendment to the federal Constitution would send us to Siberia.”

— Nancy Brink and Maria Perez, of Omaha, Nebraska, who have been together several years and are involved in a lawsuit Lambda Legal and the ACLU are litigating in federal court in Nebraska, challenging that state’s state constitutional amendment barring any recognition of same-sex relationships. A federal judge in Nebraska recently rejected the state’s effort to dismiss the lawsuit.

Nancy Brink is the minister at North Side Christian Church in Omaha, Nebraska. Last summer, she and her partner, Maria Perez, held their commitment ceremony at that very church. While their public union solidified the women’s pledge to love and care for each other and to help raise Nancy’s daughter from a former relationship, their commitment is not recognized anywhere, in any way, throughout the state.

In 2000, Nebraska passed an amendment to the state’s constitution that bars any type of recognition for same-sex relationships. Unlike other state laws that prohibit recognition of marriage between same-sex couples, the Nebraska amendment goes much further, blocking the government from recognizing same-sex relationships entirely — and effectively preventing LGBT people from lobbying their elected representatives for any kind of protection for their relationships. “The law here is so extreme,” Nancy says. “We can’t even advocate for the basic protections that most couples take for granted.”

Maria and Nancy first met at the national meeting for their denomination, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Born in Puerto Rico, Maria taught science in public school for 15 years and now teaches Spanish to college students in Omaha. Nancy is originally from

Louisiana and the daughter of a minister. She came to Omaha after attending seminary in Tennessee and serving in a few other congregations. Shortly before the two women met, Nancy had two surgical procedures, and her experience made her realize the importance of life partners being recognized in hospital and medical settings. Both Nancy and Maria fear that they will not be able to make medical decisions for each other. “With this constitutional amendment, we can’t even be sure that we’d be able to visit each other in the hospital if one of us becomes ill or incapacitated,” Nancy says.

The two women also want to make sure that they have the rights and responsibilities to care for each other if one of them becomes seriously ill and to make funeral arrangements if one of them dies. These issues became even more pressing last year when Nebraska’s Attorney General announced that a bill in the state legislature that would have given same-sex couples the right to make burial arrangements for their partners violated the constitutional amendment, and the bill quickly died. Despite such severe obstacles, Nancy and Maria have committed to care for and provide for and to love both each other and Nancy’s daughter, and they will continue to do so even in the face of the most antigay family law in the nation.