



EVAN WOLFSON

Founder and President of Freedom to Marry

"One of the 100 most influential people in the world"

- Time Magazine

"Nothing about [the marriage fight] feels quick if you consider that Evan Wolfson, a chief architect of the political quest for same-sex marriage, wrote a thesis on the topic at Harvard Law School in 1983."

-Frank Bruni,
The New York Times

Long-time civil rights leader Evan Wolfson lives in New York City, where he founded Freedom to Marry, the campaign to win marriage nationwide, and served as president through its epic victory in June 2015 until its closing in early 2016. Having achieved the goal he had pursued for 32 years, Wolfson now devotes his time to advising and assisting diverse movements and causes in the US and around the world eager to adapt the model and apply the lessons learned that made the Freedom to Marry campaign so successful. Wolfson has taught law and social change as a Distinguished Visitor from Practice at Georgetown Law Center and as a Distinguished Practitioner in Grand Strategy at Yale University; serves as Senior Counsel at Dentons, the world's largest law firm, with 190+ offices in 75+ countries; and, overseeing a fund housed at Tides Advocacy, directs a team of Freedom to Marry alumni/experts coaching human rights efforts worldwide under the banner of Freedom to Marry Global.

Widely acknowledged to be the architect of the movement that won the freedom to marry in the United States, Wolfson has received many awards, from induction into his high school hall of fame to being presented the Barnard Medal of Distinction alongside President Barack Obama in 2012. Citing his national leadership on marriage and his appearance before the U.S. Supreme Court in *Boy Scouts of America v. James Dale*, the National Law Journal in 2000 named Wolfson one of the "100 most influential



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"The indispensable man in bringing marriage equality to America is Evan Wolfson ... History will one day see him as the critical legal critic, community organizer, and strategic activist behind this movement. "

- Andrew Sullivan

"When I first heard Evan Wolfson outline his strategy to legalize same-sex marriage back in the previous century, I thought he was a dreamer. He was, but one who against so many odds made a big American dream come true. "

- Frank Rich, *New York Magazine*

attorneys in America," and he has been honored by the American Bar Association and the American Psychiatric Association, among many others. Wolfson has been called "the godfather of gay marriage" by *Newsweek* / *The Daily Beast*, and "the indispensable man in bringing marriage equality to America" by Andrew Sullivan. In 2004, *Time* magazine named Wolfson one of the "100 Most Influential People in the World."

In 2025, Evan was awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal, one of the highest civilian honors in the United States, by President Joe Biden. The White House's statement announcing the Medal recipients said: "By leading the marriage equality movement, Evan Wolfson helped millions of people in all 50 states win the fundamental right to love, marry, and be themselves. For 32 years, starting with a visionary law school thesis, Evan Wolfson worked with singular focus and untiring optimism to change not just the law, but society—pioneering a political playbook for change and sharing its lessons, even now, with countless causes worldwide."

From 1989 until 2001, Wolfson worked full-time at Lambda Legal Defense & Education Fund, the nation's preeminent advocacy group working on behalf of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and people living with HIV/AIDS. As director of Lambda Legal's Marriage Project throughout the 1990s, Wolfson created the National Freedom to Marry Coalition, the first full-fledged campaign to win marriage for same-sex couples. He was co-counsel in Hawaii's landmark *Baehr* case for the freedom to marry, which launched the ongoing global marriage equality movement, and contributed to virtually every marriage win thereafter. Wolfson has also played a part in work to win the freedom to marry in other nations, including Canada, Argentina, the United Kingdom, France, New Zealand, Ireland, and others still underway.

On April 26, 2000, Wolfson became the first Lambda attorney to argue before the United States Supreme Court when he urged the justices to reject the Boy Scouts of America's appeal of a unanimous ruling from the New Jersey Supreme Court striking down their ban on gay members and leaders. Wolfson had represented Eagle Scout James Dale since he was expelled from the BSA in 1990. Following the 5-4 vote, Wolfson helped shape the extraordinary national response from non-gay and gay people and institutions against the BSA's discrimination, challenging their harmful message to youth. In 2015, the Boy Scouts of America renounced their discriminatory national policy.

In other cases, Wolfson championed gay and lesbian military personnel fighting for the freedom to serve, gay parents wishing to adopt children and preserve their visitation rights, a Florida deputy sheriff fired for being gay, a person with AIDS seeking life-saving medical treatment refused to him by his insurer, a woman denied work as a Dallas police officer because of the state's anti-gay "sodomy" laws, and NYC employees demanding equal health benefits and recognition for their partners.



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“Evan’s vision of marriage equality has always been as generous and expansive and deserving of the word *vision* as his pursuit of it has been strategic, disciplined, and realistic.”

- Tony Kushner

Before joining Lambda, Wolfson served in Washington, D.C. as Associate Counsel to Lawrence Walsh in the Office of Independent Counsel (Iran/Contra), and in 1992, was appointed by Governor Mario Cuomo to the New York State Task Force on Sexual Harassment. Wolfson has taught as an adjunct professor of law at Columbia University and Rutgers University Law Schools, and as a teaching fellow at Harvard College.

Born in Brooklyn and raised in Pittsburgh, Wolfson graduated from Yale College in 1978. For two years after graduation, he worked as a Peace Corps volunteer in a village in Togo, West Africa. Upon returning, he attended Harvard Law School, graduating in 1983 and moving on to teach political philosophy as a teaching fellow at Harvard College. Wolfson then served as assistant district attorney for Kings County in Brooklyn, NY. There, he wrote *amicus* briefs that helped win the U.S. Supreme Court’s ban on race discrimination in jury selection (*Batson v. Kentucky*) and the New York State high court’s elimination of the marital rape exemption (*People v. Liberta*).

Wolfson has published numerous articles on sexual orientation and civil rights, beginning with his historic -- and prophetic -- 1983 law school thesis on the freedom to marry for same-sex couples. As a pro bono cooperating attorney for Lambda Legal from 1984 to 1989, Wolfson wrote Lambda’s *amicus* briefs to the Supreme Court in *Bowers v. Hardwick* and *NGTF v. Board of Education of Oklahoma City*.

Wolfson’s first book, *Why Marriage Matters: America, Equality, and Gay People’s Right to Marry* was published by Simon & Schuster in July 2004, and re-released in paperback with a new foreword in June 2005. Wolfson is a highly sought-after speaker, makes frequent appearances in the media, and provides counsel to a broad range of organizations and causes in the United States and globally, with a particular focus on human rights and changing hearts, minds, and the law.



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