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PRESS RELEASE

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U.S. Supreme Court Prevents Release of Referendum Petitions in Washington

Today, a full panel of the Supreme Court of the United States, in an 8-1 vote, issued an order preventing the Washington Secretary of State from releasing the names, addresses, and other personal information of over 138,000 individuals that signed a referendum petition that seeks to protect traditional marriage in Washington. The order will prevent several groups from making this personal information available on the internet and should protect the petition signers from the harassment similar to what occurred in California last November during the campaign surrounding Proposition 8.

James Bopp, Jr., lead counsel for Protect Marriage Washington, the group that had asked the Court to prevent the release of the names, stated, "The Supreme Court took a large step forward today in protecting the rights of citizens who support a traditional definition of marriage to speak freely. No citizen should ever have their personal property destroyed or receive death threats for exercising their right to engage in the political process. The First Amendment protects citizens from government compelled disclosure of their identity when they are engaged in political speech. The Supreme Court seems to recognize the gravity of this situation and we look forward to their review of the case on appeal."

On September 10, 2009, the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington issued an order preventing the release of the names of the petition signers. On October 15, 2009, the Ninth Circuit issued a single page order allowing the release of the names. The Supreme Court's order will prevent the release of the names until Protect Marriage Washington has an opportunity to present their appeal to the Supreme Court.

James Bopp, Jr. has a national federal and state election law practice. He is General Counsel for the James Madison Center for Free Speech and former Co-Chairman of the Election Law Subcommittee of the Federalist Society.