



Briefing from the British Humanist Association (BHA):

The British Humanist Association (BHA) is calling on MPs to support EDM 667, which calls for humanist marriages to have equal status religious marriage ceremonies.

EDM 667-HUMANIST MARRIAGE

06.09.2010

Mulholland, Greg

That this House celebrates the values of Humanists for their beliefs in love, commitment and humanity; recognises that in accordance with British equality and human rights law, Humanists should be treated equally with those of religious beliefs; believes that Humanists should be allowed to have wedding ceremonies outside a registry office like those given to persons of religious beliefs; and encourages hon. Members to support the right of their Humanist constituents to an independent wedding ceremony which recognises their own beliefs.

The present situation

People wishing to get married in England or Wales all have a choice if they wish of a register office ceremony, which by law must not be distinctive of any religion or belief, including Humanism. Only the religious have the additional option of a ceremony conducted according to their own religious beliefs. Although BHA-accredited humanist celebrants conduct hundreds weddings every year, these have no legal validity and have to be supplemented by a register office ceremony.

In other words, there is a clear discrepancy in the law whereby, in England and Wales, religious marriages have legal validity but humanist marriages do not. The BHA believes that this unequal treatment on grounds of religion or belief¹ is clear discrimination against humanists in marriage law and that the situation should be rectified.

Legally recognised humanist marriages are legal – and have been successful – in Scotland

Unlike in England and Wales, however, humanist marriages in Scotland are legal and have been so since in June 2005. Prior to this legal recognition, there were 85 humanist weddings in one year; however in 2009 alone there were 1,544 legally recognised humanist marriages in Scotland, the fourth most popular option in total and shortly behind the number of Catholic ceremonies conducted in Scotland. The Humanist Society of Scotland expects number of services they provide to keep increasing.

The growing demand for legally recognised humanist marriages throughout Great Britain demonstrates that there is a real need for such services for the non-religious population.

¹ As understood in the Equality Act 2010 and human rights legislation as including non-religious beliefs such as Humanism

BHA BRIEFING 2010: EDM 667 Humanist Marriage

11th October 2010

Cross-party Support

EDM 667 on Humanist Marriage has cross-party sponsorship and signatories, and it is supported by MPs of a range of different religions and beliefs.

Moreover, at the 2010 Liberal Democrat conference, a policy motion that included an amendment for full legal recognition of humanist marriages received overwhelming support from delegates. Both Labour Humanists and the Conservative Humanist Association (CHA) have similar policy positions in relation to supporting equal marriage for humanists.

The BHA believes that there are strong principled and human rights based arguments in favour of remedying what is essentially a legal technicality that bars humanists from having a legally valid marriage in England and Wales reflecting their non-religious, humanist beliefs.

The BHA fully endorses EDM 667 and would urge all MPs use this opportunity to sign the EDM and to affirm their support for the rights of their humanist constituents.

Please do encourage your colleagues to support this important EDM

About us

The British Humanist Association (BHA) is the national charity representing and supporting the non-religious and campaigning for an end to religious privilege and discrimination based on religion or belief.

For more detail and evidence on our position, please contact us:

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