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Dear LGBT Bar Association,

I am writing this letter in support of Elizabeth Hodges-Williams’s nomination for the 2013 LGBT Bar Association’s “40 Under 40” Award. I have the privilege of working with Elizabeth throughout the summer as her legal clerk and I am pleased to submit a nomination on her behalf. There surely can be no worthier recipient for this award.

I entered the University of Kansas School of Law in the Fall of 2012 knowing that I wanted to be an advocate for the LGBT community and to continue working for the kinds of progress that the United States has been witness to over the past few years. But to be completely honest, I was incredibly concerned about the possibilities (or maybe the lack thereof) that would avail themselves in a state like Kansas. Dorothy Gale and her timelessly fashionable ruby red slippers notwithstanding, it is no secret that Kansas generally fails to provide a social or political environment that is supportive of LGBT people or almost any of their interests. Indeed, if gay liberation were truly “somewhere over the rainbow” and the Yellow Brick Road was an interstate highway leading to it, the route out of the Sunflower State would be one-way and the Phelps family would be standing guard at the state line with signs that read “Friends of Dorothy: Do Not Enter.”

However, I stumbled upon Elizabeth’s name in a quasi-frantic attempt to make connections with the local LGBT Bar Association, KC LEGAL. I saw that Elizabeth was a board member of the organization and had dedicated most of her legal work towards LGBT advocacy⎯truly a demonstration of pure audacity in an area like Kansas City. Even more audacious is the fact that Elizabeth started her own law firm only three years ago and has already become one of the premier LGBT litigators in the area. Put simply, I knew I had to meet Elizabeth as soon as possible. I sent her an email immediately.

Elizabeth kindly obliged my message and welcomed me to her office. What I had anticipated to be a brief, time-limited discussion about how to create a career in LGBT litigation evolved into an invaluable mentor-student relationship. After our first meeting, Elizabeth offered to speak to KU Law students about the marriage equality cases before the Supreme Court and the effect that they will have on LGBT couples in the future. To be sure, KU Law students were as enthralled by Elizabeth’s knowledge, candor, and experience as I was. Ultimately, Elizabeth offered me a clerkship position in the Hodges-Williams office, which I excitedly (and immediately) accepted. Each day, I leave work more impressed with Elizabeth’s skill as an attorney and more certain that LGBT litigation is the path I want to pursue.

Elizabeth embodies all that it means to be an LGBT advocate: she has the dedication to commit her entire career to the pursuit of full LGBT equality, she has the courage to engage in her work in deep red states like Kansas and Missouri, and she has the grace and willingness to guide and pass the torch onto future generations of advocates.

Working at Hodges-Williams LLC has been the highlight of my law school experience, and I am anxious to see how the lessons I learn from Elizabeth will benefit LGBT people in my community. Indeed, the country (and especially my deeply conservative home state) could use more minds and spirits like hers.

Please feel free to contact me at the information above. I would gladly clarify and celebrate.

* Yours sincerely,

Jake McMillian