

## **More than 100 New England wedding vendors band together for the LGBTQ community post-election**

Photographer Lensy Michelle arranged a sign-up sheet for vendors to offer their services pro-bono or at a discounted rate

*By Arushi Jacob. Published Nov. 29, 2024*

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On Nov. 8, wedding photographer Lensy Michelle received an email from one of her clients. They informed her they were canceling their summer wedding and instead planned to marry before the end of the year.

The email became the first of many that Michelle received in the wake of the 2024 presidential election. Michelle, who identifies as a queer woman, says approximately half her soon-to-wed clientele are part of the LGBTQ+ community.

While the incoming administration's impact (if any) on gay marriage is unknown, the fears are real and feel imminent. Clients told Michelle they were trading their planned celebrations for City Hall ceremonies or other faster or less-expensive routes to marriage. Michelle, frustrated by the current political climate, wanted to take action and help couples in a tangible way.

"Some of them fear they won't be able to get married legally, some fear their marriage won't be recognized federally," explained Michelle.

Potential financial challenges also stood in the way of some couples' plans; the often extravagant cost of a wedding made it no longer a priority.

"Others want to start the family planning process and [want or] need to be legally married before [starting a family]," she said. "I don't ever want the cost of a wedding to impede a couple from being able to solidify their union."

Michelle began to call her industry friends and peers. Together, on Instagram, they announced an initiative seeking fellow New England-based wedding professionals and vendors to offer their services to "LGBTQ & non-citizen marriers" at a discounted rate. The services would be offered until Inauguration Day, Jan. 20, 2025.

The list, which is organized on a Google Sheets spreadsheet, now features more than 110 wedding pros who have agreed to offer their services at discounted rates. The suppliers include officiants, floral designers, photographers, and more with fees that range from a sliding scale to no cost. Factors such as the vendor's availability and the couple's location may impede a match, and inquiries are considered on a case by case basis.

Michelle adds the disclaimer she has not vetted every vendor, but the professionals individually opted in, each hoping to offset wedding costs for LGBTQ+ and non-citizen partners who had to quickly readjust or organize their plans for marriage.

Julian Kane, who owns Althea Floral Design in Cambridge, will be offering discounted floral arrangements, including bouquets and lapel pins. Rachel Bellone, who runs wedding planning business One Bell Designs in Connecticut with her wife, says they plan to provide free consultations for couples, helping to ensure they have their big day's details in place.

“The list is a great place for couples that are having some uncertainty and feeling unsafe or unwelcome in the wedding industry to go to,” said Bellone. “They can look at the list and know these vendors are going to be a safe place for couples in the community.”

On Jan. 5, Michelle and other participating wedding pros will host an in-person, all-in-one event — dubbed the Queerly Beloved Ceremonies & Ball — at the Sinclair in Cambridge. The celebration will spotlight up to 10 LGBTQ and non-citizen couples — who decided to fast-track their already planned weddings — in a series of “micro-wedding” ceremonies officiated by Somerville’s Dearly Studio. The day will commence with a disco-themed after party, celebrating the newlyweds, and open to the community members, families, and chosen families who want to support them.

“After all, the ultimate form of rebellion is joy,” said Bellone.