

D.C. City Council Passes Bill Recognizing Gay Marriages

✖ **May 5, 2009** – In a 12-1 vote, the District of Columbia City Council today passed a bill that would recognize same-sex marriages performed elsewhere in the U.S. despite vocal opposition from dozens of area pastors who crowded into the Council chambers.

“Never before have the most privileged in a city so repressed the wishes of a ... fluent majority,” said Bishop Harry Jackson, leader of the High Impact Leadership Coalition, which mobilized roughly 100 district pastors to rally against the bill. “The democratic process works best when the people’s wishes are honored and due process is observed. In the name of civil rights reform, the Council has abridged the civil rights of the masses.”

Arguing that civil rights are not “sacred rights,” Jackson said the cross-section of mostly African-American ministers are gearing up for what may be the nation’s most significant marriage battle.

Because Congress has final say over the district’s laws, Jackson and others believe the bill will force a review of the Defense of Marriage Act, which prevents states from having to recognize same-sex marriages performed elsewhere. Congress will get 30 days to consider the bill if district Mayor Adrian Fenty, who supports gay marriage, signs it.

Currently, same-sex couples can legally marry in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa and Vermont.

“I think [DOMA] is in jeopardy, and we certainly can’t rest until we know it is secure,” said Mathew D. Staver, founder of Liberty Counsel, which is advocating against the D.C. bill. “... Same-sex marriage in one state will force other states to

recognize same-sex marriage despite their own state constitutional amendments because there will be no more dam that holds back the floodwaters of same-sex marriage from overflowing the borders of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont or Iowa."

Staver and Jackson, pastor of 3,000-member Hope Christian Church in Beltsville, Md., are calling on Christians nationwide to contact their congressional representatives and urge them to oppose the district measure. "I think this is a battle that we can clearly win," Staver said. "... But we can't win it sitting on our hands. We have to move forward aggressively and firmly."

If Congress does not block the bill, openly gay Council member David Catania said he will introduce legislation later this year to allow same-sex marriages to originate in the district, the *Washington Post* reported.

"The march towards equality is coming to this country, and you can either be a part of it or stand in the way," said Catania, according to the Associated Press.

Council member Marion Barry, who changed his position last week to oppose the bill, said introducing a gay marriage law could lead to a "civil war" in the district.

"All hell is going to break loose," Barry told reporters, according to the *Post*. "We may have a civil war. The black community is just adamant against this."

After the vote today, local ministers began calling for Council members who supported the measure to be removed. "We need a new council. They are destroying our youth," said Paul Trantham, according to the *Post*. "Every minister who fears God should be here. This is disrespectful to the nation's capital. There is nothing equal about same-sex marriage."

Another traditional marriage supporter, C.T. Riley, said:

"This is not over. We are going to the Hill with this issue," the newspaper reported.

Jackson said his organization is trying to raise awareness particularly among black and Hispanic Christians, who were instrumental in passing marriage amendments in California, Florida and Arizona last November.

"We want to set up an awareness in the city of what is going on," Jackson said. "You'd be surprised how many people in the city we called who said, 'They're doing what?' People did not even know what was going on. So it very much is what we did [at the rallies today and last week] that probably got it on the radar screen of people. Now we're just trying to activate grassroots mobilization and to show that the people's voices haven't been heard."

Those efforts are currently under way. Jackson and 100 other pastors took out a full-page ad in The (Washington) Examiner today expressing their opposition to gay marriage. And he said Missionary Baptist pastors in the District launched a postcard campaign calling on Congress to allow voters to decide on the issue.