

Pray: Gay Marriage Push Underway in Minnesota House

The Democratic-led state Legislature in Minnesota is expected to begin a final push on Thursday toward making it the 12th U.S. state to extend marriage rights to same-sex couples and the third this month after Delaware and Rhode Island.

Leaders in Minnesota's state House of Representatives have scheduled a vote for Thursday to advance a bill recognizing **same-sex marriage**, which would be followed by a vote in the state Senate on Monday, party spokesmen have said.

Democratic Governor Mark Dayton has indicated that he supports making **same-sex marriage** legal in the state and has been pressing lawmakers for their backing.

House Speaker Paul Thissen had said he would not put the measure to the full House if leaders did not believe it had the support to pass. It is unclear if any Republicans will support the bill, but Democrats hold a 73-61 majority.

Opponents of the proposal have questioned whether the rights of religious groups and individuals who believe that marriage should be defined as only between a man and a woman would be protected under the bill. Supporters have said they would be.

Minnesota for Marriage, a group opposed to the bill, has called for prayer and protest on Thursday at the state Capitol in St. Paul, while Minnesotans United for All Families has asked bill supporters to wear orange and blue for the vote.

U.S. advocates for legalizing same-sex marriage have won a series of victories in the past year.

"As Americans have had a chance to really talk about who gay people are and why marriage matters, and think about their

personal values of fairness, we have grown to a significant national majority in favor of the freedom to marry,” said Evan Wolfson, founder and president of the national gay rights group Freedom to Marry.

In November, voters in Maine, Maryland and Washington state approved **same-sex marriage** at the same time that Minnesota voters rejected a ballot proposal to put a ban on same-sex marriage in the state constitution.

Until then, advocates of **same-sex marriage** had never been successful at the ballot box, and voters in more than two dozen states had approved constitutional amendments defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

Rhode Island on May 2 became the last of the six New England states to approve same-sex marriage. Delaware approved same-sex marriage on Tuesday.

Same-sex marriage is also legal in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, Vermont, New Hampshire and Iowa. The District of Columbia also has legalized same-sex marriage.

A proposal to make same-sex marriage legal remains pending before the Illinois legislature. The Illinois Senate approved a gay marriage bill on Valentine’s Day in February, but the measure has not been voted on in the full House.