

Rhode Island Mayors Call for Legalizing Gay Marriage

Six Rhode Island mayors voiced support for **same-sex marriage** on Monday, calling on the state Senate to pass a bill legalizing gay marriage that has already won overwhelming support in Rhode Island's House of Representatives.

The House in January voted strongly in favor of the bill, but the measure was expected to face an uphill battle in the state Senate.

Nine states and the District of Columbia have already legalized **gay and lesbian weddings**. Illinois, like Rhode Island, has a bill pending on the issue, with the state's Senate having approved legislation in February but with its fate in the state House uncertain.

The legislation in Rhode Island, supported by independent Gov. Lincoln Chafee, has been introduced in the House every year since 1997.

Rhode Island currently allows gay civil unions. It is the last of New England's six states without a law allowing gay nuptials.

On Monday, four mayors—Angel Taveras of Providence, Donald Grebien of Pawtucket, Daniel McKee of Cumberland and James Diossa of Central Falls—threw their support behind the bill at City Hall in Providence, said Devin Driscoll, a spokesman for Rhode Islanders United for Marriage, an advocacy group.

Two other mayors, Scott Avedisian of Warwick and Charles Lombardi of North Providence, also support the measure, but were unable to attend the news conference, Driscoll said.

“It's a strong indication of the kind of unrelenting momentum

that this campaign for **marriage equality** has,” he said, adding that the mayors were a majority of the state’s nine mayors. “This is the year.”

The state Senate president, Teresa Paiva Weed, opposes gay marriage but has said she would allow a Senate Judiciary Committee vote on the bill if it passed in the House. Last week, a Judiciary Committee hearing lasted for 12 hours, dragging on until 5 a.m., after hundreds of people signed up to testify, Driscoll said. No date has been set for the vote.

A Senate spokesman did not immediately respond to a message seeking comment.

Maryland is the most recent state to have legalized **gay marriage**, which became legal there on Jan. 1.

Despite the growing number of states that have legalized gay marriage, they are outstripped by those that have taken steps to ban the practice. Thirty states have passed constitutional amendments restricting marriage to heterosexual couples.

The U.S. Supreme Court this week is set to take up a case on whether federal benefits should go to spouses in same-sex couples and another on California’s law defining marriage as being between a man and a woman.

Editing by Barbara Goldberg and Leslie Adler

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