

Despite Christian Objections, Hawaii Says Aloha to Gay Marriage

The Hawaii Senate gave final legislative approval on Tuesday to a bill extending marriage rights to same-sex couples in a state long popular as a wedding and honeymoon destination and regarded as a pioneer in advancing the cause of **gay matrimony**.

The measure cleared the state Senate on a 19-4 vote, as hundreds of supporters who filled the chamber's visitor galleries and the Capitol rotunda, wearing flowered garland leis, cheered and applauded.

Governor Neil Abercrombie, a Democrat who called the special session to consider the bill, has indicated he would swiftly sign the legislation into law, making Hawaii the 15th U.S. state to legalize marriage for gay and lesbian couples.

An aide to the governor said he expected Abercrombie to sign the measure on Wednesday morning. As passed, the bill would take effect on Dec. 2.

The measure easily cleared the Senate, with the body's lone Republican joining three Democrats in opposing the bill. Two other Democrats were absent.

Hawaii's Supreme Court ruled two decades ago that barring same-sex marriage was discriminatory in a landmark opinion that propelled the gay rights movement nationwide, but also sparked a backlash that has kept marriage limited to heterosexual couples in the Aloha state.

The vote comes at a time of increasing momentum for gay marriage in U.S. courts, at the ballot box and statehouses across the country.

Only six states and the District of Columbia recognized same-sex marriage a year ago, but the number has since more than doubled, due in most cases to litigation over the issue.

Three states – Maine, Maryland and Washington – became the first to extend marriage rights to same-sex couples by popular vote with passage of ballot initiatives last November.

Last month, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie dropped his legal opposition to **gay marriage**, making his state the 14th to legalize same-sex weddings.

Illinois lawmakers gave final approval to a **same-sex marriage** bill on Nov. 5, and Governor Pat Quinn is expected to sign that measure into law later this month.

Allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry has been vehemently opposed in Hawaii by religious conservatives, as it has been elsewhere in the country.

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***Charisma News Asks: Is there any stopping gay marriage now?
Where does America go from here?***