

Gay Marriage Becomes Legal in NJ After Christie Drops Opposition

New Jersey on Monday became the 14th U.S. state to legalize gay marriage after Gov. **Chris Christie** withdrew his administration's legal opposition to same-sex nuptials.

The governor's decision, which came just hours after same-sex couples began marrying in New Jersey, removed a legal challenge that could have left those newlyweds in limbo until the courts ruled on an appeal previously filed by the Christie administration. That appeal was due to be heard in January.

But Christie, in a reversal, asked acting Attorney General John Hoffman to withdraw the state's appeal on Monday, the governor's office said in a statement.

"Although the governor strongly disagrees with the court substituting its judgment for the constitutional process of the elected branches or a vote of the people, the court has now spoken clearly as to their view of the New Jersey Constitution, and, therefore, **same-sex marriage** is the law," the statement said.

By a 2-1 margin, New Jersey voters in a poll earlier this month said Christie should drop the appeal.

The governor, who is heavily favored to win re-election next month and believed to be eying a White House run in 2016, has said the issue should be decided in a popular referendum.

The former federal prosecutor has enjoyed bipartisan popularity since he famously boosted the re-election chances of President Barack Obama last year by embracing his response to Superstorm Sandy.

New Jersey voters applauded Christie for putting the state's interests ahead of politics, although national Republicans responded to the gesture with dismay.

Christie has built a reputation for reaching across party lines in instances such as his friendship with Newark Mayor Cory Booker, a liberal Democrat elected last week to the U.S. Senate. Appearing as a tough Republican executive who can win a strong Democratic following may give Christie a boost on the national stage, observers have said.

Christie vetoed a **gay marriage** bill in 2012, but the issue took on renewed urgency three weeks ago when Superior Court Judge Mary Jacobson in Trenton ruled in favor of couples who had challenged the state's civil union law. The judge found that the law unfairly restricted federal benefits that are guaranteed for married couples.

Jacobson's decision made New Jersey the first state to lift a gay marriage ban as a result of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in June to strike down the federal law defining marriage as between a man and a woman.

New Jersey municipalities began accepting applications for marriage licenses for same-sex couples on Friday, and mayors around the state began officiating at gay weddings at 12:01 a.m. EST on Monday.

Under state law, those seeking to marry in **New Jersey** must wait at least 72 hours after applying for a license.

The waiting period does not apply to couples who have been legally wed in the 13 states, plus the District of Columbia, that already recognize same-sex marriage.

"Same-sex couples and their families can celebrate without fear that their rights and dignity will be taken away," said Hayley Gorenberg, deputy legal director of gay rights advocacy group Lambda Legal. "The state has now—finally—chosen to stop

standing in the way of love and fairness. What a joyous day!”

Among the officials performing the early-morning ceremonies were Booker and mayors in Lambertville, Red Bank and Jersey City.

In Newark, Booker said his tenure was ending on a high note.

“Tonight we have crossed a barrier,” Booker told the newlyweds and their families and friends. “While you all have fallen into love, the truth is the state of New Jersey has risen to love.”

Additional reporting by Victoria Cavaliere; Editing by Lisa Von Ahn

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