

Gay Rights Activists Push for Marriage Rights in Pennsylvania

One of the first challenges to a state ban on **gay marriage** since the U.S. Supreme Court partially struck down the federal Defense of Marriage Act is likely to go to trial in June in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

U.S. District Judge John Jones III, who earlier this month denied the state's request to dismiss the case, said he was looking at a June 2014 date for the challenge to Pennsylvania's **Defense of Marriage Act**.

The Pennsylvania case, *Whitewood v. Wolf*, was filed just weeks after the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in June that struck down part of the federal law **defining marriage** as a union between one man and one woman.

"It's an important case and it will give us an opportunity to have a full airing of the record," said Mark Aronchik, a private lawyer for Pennsylvania **same-sex couples** who are challenging the statute.

The state had argued that the Pennsylvania court lacked the authority to hear the case and it should be dismissed, but Jones rejected that argument and noted that case law dealing with issues of equal protection has recently undergone a "sea change."

At least 36 states have "mini-DOMA" statutes, and challenges have come up in nearly all of them, according to Freedom to Marry, an advocacy group.

The *Whitewood* lawsuit was the first filed since the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling, but another case, filed in Michigan,

is slated for trial in February.

Pennsylvania is the only state in the northeast region that does not recognize **gay marriages** or same-sex civil unions.

Same-sex couples have filed at least five lawsuits challenging Pennsylvania's **gay marriage** ban. The Whitewood case, in particular, stirred controversy among the state's political leaders after Pennsylvania Attorney General Kathleen Kane announced in July that she would not defend the state's statute.