

Hawaii Throws in Towel on Same-Sex Marriage Fight

Hawaii will no longer defend a law that defines marriage as only between a man and a woman, five months after the state legalized **same-sex marriage**, state officials said on Monday.

The state will stop defending against a lawsuit filed in 2011 by a same-sex couple who sought to declare Hawaii's old marriage law unconstitutional, according to a statement from Attorney General David M. Louie.

Last November, Gov. Neil Abercrombie, a Democrat, had signed a bill extending marriage rights to same-sex couples. The law took effect Dec. 2.

"The law, policy and public sentiment in Hawaii has clearly and dramatically changed in favor of marriage equality," said Louie.

In response to the 2011 lawsuit, the state had filed two separate answers, one representing then-Director of Health Loretta Fuddy and the other representing Abercrombie. Fuddy's legal team had defended the law as constitutional, while Abercrombie had agreed with the plaintiffs.

Both Abercrombie and the current health director, Dr. Linda Rosen, supported the decision to stop defending the law, according to the statement. The health department has helped more than 1,400 same-sex couples obtain marriage licenses over the past five months, Rosen said.

Momentum toward expanding marriage rights for same-sex couples has grown since the U.S. Supreme Court in June last year ruled that legally married gay couples were eligible for federal benefits.

Seventeen states plus the District of Columbia allow same-sex couples to marry. That number would increase sharply if federal court rulings striking down bans in several states are upheld on appeal.

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