

Illinois Lawmakers Clear Way for Same-Sex Marriage

Illinois is poised to become the 15th U.S. state to allow same-sex unions after lawmakers in President Barack Obama's home state gave final approval to a bill on Tuesday.

The state Senate approved **gay marriage** on Valentine's Day in February, but there was a delay in bringing the vote to the House, even though Democrats have a strong majority.

Following a 61-54 House vote on Tuesday—just one vote more than what was needed—the bill was given final approval by the Senate, and will go to Democratic Gov. Pat Quinn, who has pledged his support. The final Senate vote was 32-21.

The votes were followed by cheers and applause in both chambers.

The proposal was resisted by some African-American Democratic lawmakers who were under pressure from outspoken black Protestant churches to oppose it. The leadership of the **Catholic Church** in Illinois also has staunchly opposed the proposal.

"I am voting for **marriage equality** today because it is the right thing to do," Democratic lawmaker Jehan Gordon-Booth, who is African-American, said during the debate. "I know enhancing the civil rights of others does not diminish the civil rights of anyone in this room or anyone in this state."

Obama said in a statement he was "overjoyed" that legislators voted to legalize gay marriage.

"Our journey as a nation is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law, for if we are truly created equal, then surely the love

we commit to one another must be equal as well," he said.

Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel called the vote a "critical moment in history" for Illinois and the gay rights movement.

"Finally, gays and lesbians across our state are guaranteed the fundamental right to marry, and countless couples with children will be acknowledged for what they are under the law – families just like everyone else," said Emanuel.

Once signed, the law will go into effect June 1 of next year.

A vote has been delayed for months in part because Illinois has been preoccupied with a financial crisis stemming from huge pension liabilities that have led major credit agencies to lower the state's rating to the lowest among U.S. states. The state also has billions of dollars of unpaid bills, forcing social service agencies to curtail or delay many services.

Opponents expressed concern that under the proposed **gay marriage law**, religious organizations that decline to allow their facilities to be used for gay marriages could face lawsuits. The amended version of the bill passed Tuesday provides safeguards for religious organizations.

Opponents on the House floor Tuesday quoted the Bible, and even the song "Tradition" from the musical **Fiddler on the Roof**, to support limiting marriage to one man and one woman.

"There are many people who believe in the fundamental traditional definition of a marriage of a man and a woman," said David Harris, a Republican opponent of the bill. "They are not homophobic."

Illinois currently allows **civil unions**, which **gay rights activists** said does not go far enough.

A year ago, only six states—Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, New York, Connecticut and Iowa—plus the District of

Columbia recognized **same-sex marriage**, but the number has since more than doubled.

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. Gay marriage became legal this year in California, Delaware, Minnesota, Rhode Island.

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

The Hawaii state Senate has approved gay marriage but it has not yet come up for a vote in the House.

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