

Judge: Kentucky Must Recognize Same-Sex Marriages From Other States

Kentucky must recognize the legal same-sex marriages of residents who wed outside the state, a federal judge said on Wednesday in the latest of a series of rulings that expand gay rights following a U.S. Supreme Court decision last year.

Four Kentucky same-sex couples who were married out of state had challenged a state law that declared such marriages void and the accompanying rights unenforceable. They did not challenge a state constitutional ban on same-sex marriage.

U.S. District Judge John G. Heyburn II in Louisville said a series of U.S. Supreme Court decisions including the striking down of a key part of the federal Defense of Marriage Act last year led to his decision on Wednesday.

"Each of these small steps has led to this place and this time, where the right of same-sex spouses to the state-conferred benefits of marriage is virtually compelled," Heyburn said in a 23-page ruling.

Same-sex marriage is legal in 17 states plus the District of Columbia but not in the remaining states, and the debate over gay marriage is playing out in a series of court challenges around the United States.

The Kentucky ruling came on the same day that same-sex couples in Missouri challenged that state's ban on recognizing their marriages from other states.

Reporting by David Bailey; Editing by Meredith Mazzilli

