

Judge Roy Moore Puts a Stop to Same-Sex Marriage in Alabama

The chief justice of Alabama's Supreme Court ordered the state's probate judges on Wednesday not to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples despite a ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court last year legalizing gay marriage.

Gay marriage activists and legal experts assailed the order, arguing last June's landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision afforded same-sex couples the right to marry in all 50 states.

In a phone interview, Chief Justice Roy Moore, who issued the order, said judges were bound by the state Supreme Court's decision last March halting same-sex marriage until that court determines the effect on the state of the national ruling.

A federal judge in Alabama overturned the state's ban on same-sex marriage last January.

"There is a great confusion out there as to what orders to obey," Moore said. "I'm not causing the confusion, I'm trying to clarify it."

Many probate judges were issuing marriage licenses to gay and lesbian couples while others refused to do so, he said.

One probate judge, Steven Reed in Montgomery, Alabama, said his office would not heed the administrative order. "Judge Moore's latest charade is just sad & pathetic," Reed posted on Twitter.

But the Mobile County probate court said on its website that it would stop issuing marriage licenses to any applicants gay or straight until further notice "to ensure full compliance with all court rulings."

The Southern Poverty Law Center, which has an ongoing ethics complaint against Moore, said he should be removed from the bench for telling the state's judges to enforce Alabama's ban on same-sex marriage.

"It's a disgrace to his office that he occupies it," said Richard Cohen, president of the Alabama-based law center. Cohen said judges who follow Moore's order risked being held in contempt of court for violating the federal judge's ruling.

In Kentucky last year, County Clerk Kim Davis was jailed for five days after refusing to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples despite the U.S. Supreme Court ruling, making her a focal point in the U.S. gay marriage debate.

Moore, a Republican, has been a hero of conservative causes before. In 2003, he was removed from office after a federal judge ruled he was placing himself above the law by refusing to take down a Ten Commandments monument.

He won the chief justice job back in a 2012 election, vowing not to do anything to create further friction with the federal courts. {eoa}

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