

Kentucky Governor Gives Kim Davis a 'Wonderful Christmas Gift'

Kentucky's new governor on Tuesday ordered county clerks' names removed from state marriage license forms at the center of a controversy involving Rowan County Clerk Kim Davis, who was jailed after refusing to issue licenses to gay couples.

Governor Matt Bevin had said shortly after his election in November, as only the second Republican governor of Kentucky since 1971, that he would change the forms that had drawn objections from Davis and some other clerks.

"To ensure that the sincerely held religious beliefs of all Kentuckians are honored, I took action to revise the clerk marriage license form," Bevin said in a statement.

It was unclear what effect his executive order would have on Davis' case.

She made headlines by refusing to issue marriage licenses to gay and lesbian couples, even after the U.S. Supreme Court in June legalized same-sex matrimony across the United States.

Citing her Apostolic Christian beliefs defining marriage as a union exclusively reserved for heterosexual couples, Davis spent five days in jail for defying an order by U.S. District Judge David Bunning to comply with the high court's decision.

Her jailing drew international attention and demonstrations from both sides of the issue. Davis, 50, also briefly met Pope Francis in September in Washington during his visit to the United States.

Officials with the American Civil Liberties Union, representing couples who had sued Davis, said Bevin's move

only “added to the cloud of uncertainty that hangs over marriage licenses in Kentucky,” as clerk names are required by state law to appear on the licenses.

Mat Staver, a lawyer for Davis, called the governor’s action “a wonderful Christmas gift” allowing the county clerk to celebrate the holidays without having to choose between her faith and her job.

Davis took steps to remove her name and office from the forms after she was released from jail, and a deputy clerk has issued licenses on her behalf.

Davis repeatedly urged then-Governor Steve Beshear, a Democrat, to remove clerk names from the form or provide other relief so she would not violate her religious beliefs.

She has also appealed Bunning’s orders to the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. Bunning and the appeals court have repeatedly denied her stays in the case.

Beshear had said he had no authority to relieve county clerks of their statutory duties by executive order and that the state legislature could address the issue.

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