

NC Lawmakers Let Pastors Opt Out of Gay Marriage Ceremonies

Government officials in North Carolina can refuse to perform same-sex marriages by citing religious objections under a law enacted on Thursday by the Republican-led legislature, which voted to override the governor's veto.

The law protects the jobs of magistrates and other officials who refuse to perform marriages of gay couples by citing a "sincerely held religious objection."

Governor Pat McCrory, also a Republican, had said the officials who swore to defend the Constitution and perform their duties of office should not be exempt from upholding their oath.

The state House of Representatives overrode his veto by reaching the three-fifths majority in a 69-41 vote. The state Senate overrode the veto earlier this month.

While gay marriage was targeted in a wave of conservative legislation in U.S. statehouses this year, North Carolina is among the few states to pass a measure. Utah approved a similar opt-out law earlier this year.

North Carolina House Speaker Tim Moore said in a statement after the vote that the law "protects sincerely held religious beliefs while also ensuring that magistrates are available in all jurisdictions to perform lawful marriages."

Once they have asked to opt out in writing, magistrates would be barred from performing any marriage, gay or heterosexual, for six months.

A court decision last year invalidated a North Carolina law

banning same-sex marriage.

Gay marriage is now legal in 36 states plus the District of Columbia. In Alabama, a federal court struck down the gay-marriage ban, but the state Supreme Court has stopped local officials from issuing marriage licenses to gay couples.

The U.S. Supreme Court is expected to decide by the end of June whether same-sex marriage should be legal nationwide.