

NH Legalizes Gay Marriage

New Hampshire Gov. John Lynch signed a gay marriage bill into law Wednesday, making his traditionally conservative state one of six nationwide that permit same-sex unions.

In May, Lynch said he would sign the same-sex marriage bill if the Legislature revised the language to state that religious organizations and their employees cannot be forced to sanction same-sex weddings under the law.

Although legislators were expected to adopt the changes quickly, the state House voted against the revisions. It passed a newly revised bill on Wednesday in a 198-176 vote, the Associated Press (AP) reported.

The measure specifies that all religious organizations, associations or societies have "exclusive control" over their religious doctrines, policies, teachings and beliefs on marriage, the AP said. It also states that church-related organizations that serve charitable or educational purposes are exempt from having to provide insurance and other benefits to same-sex spouses of employees.

The Senate also passed the revised measure on Wednesday.

Although Lynch expressed support for traditional marriage, he said he decided to view the issue "through a broader lens," the AP reported.

The Alliance Defense Fund, a legal firm that supports traditional marriage, said Lynch's revisions would not prevent new attacks on religious liberty abuses.

"The governor is right to recognize the threat to religious liberty, but he underestimates the threat by a long shot," said ADF Senior Legal Counsel Austin R. Nimocks, who testified before the New Hampshire Senate last month to address Lynch's

proposed revisions. "Where are the protections for business owners with religious objections to recognizing same-sex 'marriages'? Formally affiliated organizations are not the only ones who need their religious liberty protected."

New Hampshire joins Iowa, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Maine in allowing gay marriage. Voters are mounting a legal challenge to the Maine law. The New Hampshire bill is to take effect in January.