

North Carolina Official to Accept Gay Marriage Applications

North Carolina Attorney General Roy Cooper personally supports gay marriage but is committed to defending the state's ban on **same-sex weddings**, a spokeswoman said on Monday, a day before a local official said he would start accepting marriage applications from gay couples.

Drew Reisinger, Buncombe County register of deeds, said that until he gets Cooper's permission, he would withhold his signature from applications that gay couples were welcome to begin filing at 8 a.m. EDT (1200 GMT) on Tuesday.

He said he made the decision in light of the U.S. Supreme Court decision striking down a key part of the 1996 **Defense of Marriage Act** that denied benefits to same-sex married couples.

North Carolina is among 29 U.S. states with constitutional amendments defining marriage as between a man and a woman. Six other states, including Pennsylvania, have laws that do so.

Local officials in Pennsylvania and New Mexico, which has no law banning or approving same-sex nuptials, have begun issuing marriage licenses to gay couples since the June 26 high court ruling.

Reisinger wants to join their ranks, but his decision to first get Cooper's permission could put his effort on hold for a long time.

"The State Constitution says that these marriage licenses cannot be issued and this is the law unless the Constitution is changed or the court says otherwise," Noelle Talley, spokeswoman for Cooper, said in an email.

The Democratic attorney general personally supports **gay marriage** but he is committed to defending the state ban in a pending lawsuit, Talley said.

Reisinger told Reuters: “Lord knows I’ve had a handful of close friends who are in same-sex relationships come in and ask for a marriage license. It’s hard to get the words out to tell them, ‘No.’”

He said licenses were sought by six same-sex couples, including a lesbian couple together for 20 years whose request had been repeatedly denied.

“I have concerns about whether we are violating people’s civil rights based on this summer’s **Supreme Court** decision,” said Reisinger, 30, who is married and was elected to his post in Asheville, N.C., three years ago.

In Pennsylvania, Attorney General Kathleen Kane, who also is a Democrat, said in July she would not defend her state’s ban on gay marriage in a case before federal court in Pennsylvania, calling it “wholly unconstitutional.”

Gay marriage opponents see local officials who issue marriage licenses to gay couples—even though they live outside the 13 states and the District of Columbia that have legalized gay marriage—as trying to make an end-run around the law.

While public backing for gay marriage in the United States has been growing, with a July Gallup poll showing 52 percent of Americans would like to see it legalized throughout the country, support is weakest in the South.

Additional reporting by Alex Dobuzinskis; Editing by Mohammad Zargham

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