

Pennsylvania Judge Orders County Clerk to Stop Marrying Gay Couples

A Pennsylvania judge has ordered a Montgomery County court official to stop issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

In an opinion issued on Thursday, Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court President Judge Dan Pellegrini wrote that Montgomery County Register of Wills Bruce Hanes did not have the power to decide on his own whether the state's ban on gay marriage was unconstitutional.

The state's Health Department sued Hanes in August after he began issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Hanes began issuing the licenses after the U.S. Supreme Court in June ruled that the federal government must recognize same-sex unions in states where they are legal.

Pennsylvania Attorney General Kathleen Kane announced that she would not defend the state's ban on gay marriage.

Frank Custer, a spokesman for Montgomery County, says officials there are still reviewing the ruling. They have stopped issuing licenses, he said.

Thirteen U.S. states and the District of Columbia recognize gay marriage. Pennsylvania is among six potential states targeted by gay marriage advocates for a future push to legalize same sex-nuptials in 2015 and 2016, according to the Freedom to Marry advocacy group.

Hawaii's governor on Monday called for a special legislative session in October to take up a bill to legalize gay marriage in the island state.