

# San Antonio Approves Gay Rights Measure After Fierce Debate

San Antonio approved a measure on Thursday that outlaws discrimination against gays, despite fierce opposition from conservatives and marking a victory for Mayor Julian Castro, who is considered a rising figure in the national Democratic Party.

The proposal, which added "sexual preference and gender identity" to groups protected in places such as restaurants and housing, sparked weeks of emotional debate that pitted top Republicans in the state against Castro and other supporters.

"This ordinance fundamentally is about insuring that whether you are white or black, whether you are Christian or Jew, whether you are straight or gay, this city belongs to you too," Castro said.

By approving the measure 8-3 in the city council, San Antonio joins 180 other U.S. municipalities, including four major Texas cities, to bar such discrimination, according to Paul Guequierre, a spokesman for the Human Rights Campaign, a gay rights organization. In Texas, Austin, Brownsville, Dallas, and Fort Worth have laws on the books that are nearly identical to the one in San Antonio.

Greg Abbott, Texas Attorney General and the frontrunner to be the next governor of the state, campaigned against the measure, as did U.S. Senator Ted Cruz, an outspoken conservative.

"This proposed ordinance runs contrary to the Texas Constitution, which defines marriage as the union of one man and one woman," Abbott said.

Two public hearings in the nation's seventh-largest city attracted hundreds of participants who invoked everything from the famous 19th century defenders of the Alamo fort in San Antonio to the 1960s black civil rights movement.

Some called homosexuality a "filthy lifestyle," and supporters said opponents were "mean spirited, and bigoted."

The Republican-led Texas Legislature has not approved similar protections statewide, and opposition to same sex marriage or civil unions is strong among Republicans, who hold every statewide office in Texas.

"This does not attempt to legalize same sex marriage," San Antonio City Attorney Michael Bernard said. "It does not regulate anybody's speech or action."

Gerald Flowers, a prominent San Antonio pastor, called the ordinance offensive and said it puts Christians who oppose homosexuality in the position of being permanent second class citizens.

"This thing is so central to the heart of so many people in this city that we cannot let it rest," Flowers said. "This doesn't end today."

The Liberty Institute, a non-profit group that advocates religious freedom, has said it may file a federal lawsuit to block the measure.

Castro, who delivered the keynote address at the 2012 Democratic National Convention, is seen by some Democrats as a potential future Texas governor or national politician representing a state with a rapidly rising Hispanic population.