

Washington State Readies for Flood of Same-Sex Marriage Applicants

A law legalizing same-sex matrimony took effect in Washington state on Thursday, and officials geared up for a flood of marriage-license applications from gay and lesbian couples eager to exchange vows.

Washington made history last month as one of three U.S. states where marriage rights were extended to **same-sex couples** by popular vote, joining Maryland and Maine in passing ballot initiatives on Nov. 6 recognizing gay nuptials.

Washington became the first of those states to put its law into effect—it became law at the stroke of midnight—and same-sex matrimony is set to go on the books in Maine on Dec. 29 and in Maryland on Jan. 1.

Under Washington state law, all would-be brides and grooms must submit their marriage certificates at least three days in advance. So the first wave of same-sex Washington weddings—expected to number in the hundreds—is scheduled for Sunday.

In Olympia, the state capital, the Thurston County Auditor's Office planned to grant marriage licenses to the 15 same-sex couples who entered a lottery to be served first at midnight. The office was to reopen in the morning to serve others.

"This is an historic occasion," said Thurston County Auditor Kim Wyman, a Republican. "Some of these couples have been together for more than 20 or 30 years. It's pretty moving when you hear those stories."

Lisa Brodoff and Lynn Grotsky, partners of nearly 32 years,

became the first same-sex couple in Thurston County, and perhaps the state, to receive a marriage license—to the cheers of a crowd of other same-sex couples and supporters.

“We have the greatest feeling of happiness and relief and excitement,” said Brodoff, 57, a law professor at Seattle University.

Grotsky, a 56-year-old social worker, said that when she and Brodoff became a couple, they were afraid to tell acquaintances and co-workers that they were lesbians.

“Everything was a fight and a conflict,” Grotsky said. “Now it’s like we’re regular people.”

The pair, who hugged and kissed after getting their license, could have tied the knot in one of the six states where same-sex marriage was already legal, but wanted to wait until they could marry in their home state.

Saving That Date

In Seattle, about 150 same-sex couples lined up outside county offices shortly before midnight, waiting in a festive atmosphere for the doors to open to obtain marriage licenses. Some sat in lawn chairs and others brought late-night picnics.

While heterosexual couples face difficulties enough picking an ideal time and place for their nuptials, the fraught politics of **same-sex marriage** in Washington state made it even trickier for gay and lesbian couples to plan ahead.

The Democratic-controlled state legislature passed a bill to legalize **gay marriage** in February, and Democratic Gov. Christine Gregoire swiftly signed it into law.

But opponents collected enough signatures to temporarily block the measure from taking effect and force the issue onto the state ballot in November. Voters passed it by 54 percent to 46 percent.

"It feels like we're on even ground," said Derek Hoffman, 33, who received a license in Olympia to marry his partner of 10 years, Chris Waterman, 35. "Like not being less than other people."

Olympia residents Tina Roose and Teresa Guajardo said they would wait until Dec. 15 to marry, having reserved the majestic state Capitol rotunda for a pre-Christmas wedding ceremony.

The uncertainty of the ballot initiative process proved a bit of a nail-biter as Roose and Guajardo waited for the election results to see if they could keep their reservation.

"I am able to marry the person that I love," Roose said. She said the couple had invited others, both gay and straight, to tie the knot alongside them at the Capitol.

"I just ran into a colleague today at a grocery," added Roose, a retired librarian. "She was so excited. She asked all the typical questions like, 'What are you going to wear?'"

As for those who voted against same-sex marriage, Roose said she hoped they would be won over "with love."

"You can only change people's attitudes one heart at a time," she said.

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