

Washington State Senate Passes Same-Sex Marriage Bill

The Washington state Senate on Wednesday night passed a bill that would legalize gay marriage. If the bill is signed into law, it would make Washington the seventh state to allow gays and lesbians to enter marriage.

“Those of us who support this legislation are not, and we should not be accused of, undermining family life or **religious freedom**,” the bill’s sponsor, Democratic Sen. Ed Murray, a gay lawmaker from Seattle, said in an AP report. “Marriage is how society says you are a family.”

Among the lawmakers arguing against the bill was Sen. Dan Swecker from Rochester. He said the bill alters the definition of marriage.

“It’s ironic how a bill which purports to be about ending discrimination leaves the door open so far for discrimination going in the other direction,” the AP reported Swecker as saying. “I’m extremely concerned that without additional protections, this legislation will create a hostile environment for those of us who believe in **traditional marriage**.”

Opponents of the legislation plan to battle back. If the law passes, opponents will work to gather 120,577 signatures by June to get a ballot referendum. That would delay **gay marriage** until after the November election, and perhaps permanently if the people of Washington rise up against it at the polls.

The bill now heads to the state House of Representatives, which is expected to vote to move the legislation to the desk of Gov. Chris Gregoire as soon as next week. Gregoire previously announced support for the bill and said she would sign it into law.

"I thank Microsoft, Nike, Vulcan, Inc., RealNetworks, Group Health Cooperative and Concur for standing up for marriage equality in our state," she said on Jan. 19. "They understand that our same-sex couples deserve the same respect and dignity as their peers and that loving, committed relationships add to vibrant and diverse workforces. The support of these employers is courageous and appreciated."

Gregoire signed a domestic partner bill into law in April 2007.