

Will Rhode Island Hold the Line Against Gay Marriage?

Rhode Island is the next big battleground for **gay marriage**. Supporters hope it will soon become the 10th state to legalize same-sex marriage.

But traditional marriage advocates say it's still possible that lawmakers will once again say no. Close to 1,000 Rhode Islanders crammed into the Providence statehouse last week, hoping to send a message.

"It should be defined men and women, men and women," Luis Hernandez, who supports **traditional marriage**, said.

"Because God established a man and a woman only," Bilma Delcompare, another traditional marriage supporter, said.

Chris Plante, with the National Organization for Marriage in Rhode Island, said lawmakers are listening to their constituents on this one. And, he added, they should not be swayed by talk of equality.

"This is not about equality or rights because both those rights and equality were granted in the **civil unions** bill in 2011 where same-sex couples were granted all the rights and benefits of married couples in Rhode Island," Plante said.

As matters stand, the House gay marriage bill would strip Rhode Islanders of their **religious freedom** on the issue. That's because it contains no protection for faith groups, counselors or wedding vendors who oppose gay marriage.

Already in nearby Vermont, a lesbian couple sued an inn that refused to support their gay wedding.

The speaker of the House in Rhode Island, who is openly gay, said he wants a **same-sex marriage** vote by the end of the

month.

The governor is also supportive. That puts pressure squarely on the Senate, where the president is a known opponent of same-sex marriage.

There's no doubt the pressure is on. For years, this smallest state in the union has remained the one regional holdout against gay marriage.

"If you have it [a vote] happen here, you would have a lock, if you will, in this region around the issue of same-sex marriage," Brown University's Dr. Marion Orr said.

All the other New England states have approved gay marriage, along with Ohio, Maryland and Washington. And lawmakers in Illinois also plan to consider the issue this year.