



**EQUALITY
ILLINOIS**

PRESS RELEASE

Founded in 1991, Equality Illinois is the state's oldest, largest and most effective organization advocating for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Illinoisans.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Freedom to Marry Wins Because Illinois Believes in Fair Treatment for All Families

SPRINGFIELD – The historic bill recognizing the freedom to marry for gay and lesbian couples in Illinois today cleared the Illinois House of Representatives, with the Senate expected to concur with the effective date shortly, the final legislative actions needed to make Illinois the next state where marriage for same-sex couples will be legal once signed, as promised, by Gov. Pat Quinn.

"Today's historic marriage vote was a victory for all families and their children," said Bernard Cherkasov, CEO of Equality Illinois, the state's oldest, largest and most effective advocacy organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. "It was a victory for hundreds of clergy who joined forces in support of the law, and for scores of major employers who made the business case for equality, and for parents who just wanted all their children to be treated the same."

For this moment in history, Equality Illinois offers a humble "thank you" to all who made it possible, Cherkasov continued. "Just as we passed every single measure of LGBT equality in the Land of Lincoln, the marriage bill passed with bi-partisan support in both chambers, with suburban and downstate, African American and Latino lawmakers all coming together to do what is right by our families. I could not be prouder," he said.

Leading the way were the pioneers who demonstrated why the freedom to marry is an inevitable national movement that is capturing the hearts and the support of a majority of Americans.

"We thank the thousands of couples who have bravely built families even without the protections and benefits of marriage because their love is equal to anyone else's and their commitment to each other and their children knows no boundaries," Cherkasov said. "The freedom to marry will soon be the law because Illinois believes in fair treatment for all families."

One gay civil rights pioneer, Chicago businessman Art Johnston, a co-founder and board member emeritus of Equality Illinois, said that the freedom to marry was not even a dream when he began working on LGBT causes in Illinois more than 35 years ago.

"We were working on very basic human rights issues such as the Chicago ordinance banning discrimination based on sexual orientation (which passed in 1988). No one mentioned marriage," Johnston said. "It is unbelievable that here we are just 25 years later with a marriage bill headed to the governor's desk."

Johnston has been with his partner Jose "Pepe" Pena since 1973. "We obtained an Illinois civil union the day they became legal. By then we did dream of marriage but didn't believe that the possibility would arrive so soon. It's a very emotional and heartwarming day for us and the community," Johnston said.

Cherkasov said that many people and institutions stepped up to the challenge of passing the bill, continuing the national momentum for the freedom to marry that received a major boost in the November elections.

"We thank everyone who made a call, sent an email, staffed a phone bank, knocked on doors, signed a post card, wrote letters, attended a rally, and contributed financially for this expansive effort," Cherkasov said.

"We thank Rep. Greg Harris and Sen. Heather Steans for sponsoring the bill, which meant exhaustive hours working it through the legislative maze," he continued. "Gov. Quinn, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, House Speaker Michael Madigan and Senate President John Cullerton, Senators Dick Durbin and Mark Kirk, numerous other public officials, members of both parties, leaders of the faith, business, African-American and Latino communities and sports figures all contributed mightily to victory."

Cherkasov led a team of Equality Illinois advocates working tirelessly for the Religious Freedom and Marriage Fairness Act and who partnered with Lambda Legal and ACLU of Illinois and others in the Illinois Unites for Marriage coalition.

As Equality Illinois celebrates today, we also remember that our work for marriage equality is not done. We must defend the new law against possible challenges and support the battles being fought in other states and continue the effort to make the freedom to marry the law of the land.

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