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Illinois Unites Celebrates Historic Week for Equal Marriage

Rhode Island, Delaware among states advancing bills extending the freedom to marry; momentum in Illinois continues to build

SPRINGFIELD – April 25, 2013 – In a major national legislative victory that moves another U.S. state closer to equal treatment for all families, the Rhode Island Senate voted yesterday to approve the freedom to marry for same-sex couples. Rhode Island now stands poised to become the 10th state in the nation to enact marriage equality legislation. The state’s House of Representatives already approved the measure but must vote again on a revised version. A final vote is expected on May 2, and Gov. Lincoln Chafee has vowed to sign the bill.

The Rhode Island bill drew support from every Republican in the Rhode Island Senate, echoing increased GOP support across the country from figures that include U.S. Senators Mark Kirk (R-Illinois) and Rob Portman (R-Ohio.)

“We celebrate this victory and applaud the state of Rhode Island for taking this step toward treating all families equally under the law,” said Rep. Greg Harris (D-Chicago), who is the chief House sponsor of the Illinois marriage bill, the Religious Freedom and Marriage Fairness Act.

Also this week, Delaware’s marriage equality bill cleared the House on a 23-to-18 vote and now goes to the state Senate; Gov. Jack Markell has promised to sign the bill once it reaches his desk. The Nevada Senate passed a resolution late Monday in a 12-9 vote repealing the state's heterosexual definition of marriage, the first step in recognizing the freedom to marry for all couples. Minnesota is also set to consider legislation soon.

“With the Illinois House poised for final action on this legislation, the direction forward is clear. It is time for Illinois to join the states that recognize the value and dignity of equal rights for all committed couples,” Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan wrote in an op-ed that appeared in yesterday’s *Chicago Tribune*.

The news this week comes against a backdrop of national polling showing that a majority of Americans believe gays and lesbians should have the freedom to marry. A recent *Crain’s/Ipsos* poll shows Illinoisans supporting marriage equality, with 50 percent in favor and only 29 percent opposed. Of the 50 percent in support, 37 percent “strongly” support the freedom to marry.

“This week’s votes show the continued momentum for marriage equality across the country,” said Bernard Cherkasov, CEO of Equality Illinois. “We’re seeing that momentum in the Illinois General Assembly, too, where more and more legislators are telling us they want to be on the right side of history.”

“The Republicans in Rhode Island said they believe that freedom means freedom for everyone, and that every citizen deserves the freedom to marry the person they love,” added Jim Bennett of Lambda Legal. “We couldn’t agree more. Illinois and so many more states are growing closer each day.”

Illinois Unites for Marriage – a coalition led by Equality Illinois, Lambda Legal and the ACLU of Illinois – is continuing its statewide campaign in support of the bill, marshaling support and urging allies to step up contacts with their legislators as the House vote approaches. The coalition supporting the freedom to marry for all loving, committed couples – already strong with business, labor and community leaders, civic organizations, faith institutions and members of the clergy, African-American leaders, Republicans and Democrats – continues to grow.

Information about the legislation is available at www.illinoisunites.org, along with information about how citizens can make their voices heard.

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