

Beat: Miscellaneous

Illinois OKs statewide gay marriages before law takes effect

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USPA News - All same-sex couples in the U.S. state of Illinois will now be able to get married, even though the law that legalizes gay marriages in the state does not take effect until June, Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan announced late Tuesday, following a federal court ruling last month. The attorney general provided guidance to all county clerks in Illinois on Tuesday that same-sex couples will be able to receive marriage licenses immediately, and the state's Department of Public Health will now accept all marriage licenses issued by any county clerk in Illinois.

"Nobody should have to wait for equal rights when it comes to love. I encourage every county clerk in Illinois to quickly follow the Attorney General's guidance," said Governor Pat Quinn, responding to Tuesday's announcement. Quinn has been a strong supporter of same-sex marriage legalization and signed the Religious Freedom and Marriage Fairness Act on November 20. Madigan's guidance follows a court order by U.S. District Judge Sharon Coleman last month that allowed same-sex couples in Cook County, which includes the city of Chicago, to get married more than three full months before the June 1 date set by the Illinois Legislature last year. Cook County Clerk David Orr had filed a brief in support of a lawsuit which argued that same-sex couples should not have to wait until the state law takes effect. In his ruling, Judge Coleman said committed same-sex couples have "suffered enough from the denial of their right to marry," and no opposition was presented to the court. Orr began issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples immediately after the February 21 ruling and even kept the Downtown Bureau of Vital Records open an extra two hours. Marriage licenses take effect the next calendar day after being issued and are valid for 60 days, and officials have cautioned couples who have planned a summer wedding to wait or risk having their license expire before the wedding date. Under the new rules, couples who already have an Illinois civil union license will be waived the \$60 license fee. However, couples who want to convert their prior civil union date to a marriage will have to wait until the originally effective date - June 1 - because those terms were not addressed in Judge Coleman's order. When Quinn signed the gay marriage bill into law last year, it clearly stated that same sex marriages in the state could be performed starting June 1, 2014. But two women, both in their 60s and who had entered into a civil union in 2011, challenged the effective date in federal court last year. The women, one of whom had been battling breast cancer for 17 years and was advised that she had little time left to live, sued the U.S. District Court and requested a marriage license immediately. Given the special circumstances, U.S. District Judge Thomas M. Durkin granted the request and the couple wed privately in November. In December, Judge Coleman already ruled that same-sex couples in which one of the partners suffers from a life-threatening illness are allowed to marry early. "This Court can conceive of no reason why the public interest would be disserved by allowing a few couples facing terminal illness to wed a few months earlier than the timeline would currently allow," she said in the December ruling. Support for same-sex marriage has increased across the United States in recent years, with now 17 states and the District of Columbia performing them. Additionally, judges in Virginia and Oklahoma have struck down same-sex marriage bans but left them in place pending appeals. A Gallup poll in 1996 found that only 27 percent of Americans were in favor of same-sex marriage, but the latest survey conducted in July 2013 found that 54 percent of Americans are now in favor of allowing marriages between people of the same gender.

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