

Massachusetts Lawmakers Advance Proposed 2008 Ballot Measure That Would End Marriage Equality in Bay State

Putting the rights of a minority up for popular vote is always wrong'

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Massachusetts legislators, in yesterday's last session of the state's 2006 constitutional convention, approved a citizen-initiated proposed constitutional amendment to end marriage equality for same-sex couples as a first step toward putting the measure on the 2008 ballot. The vote was 134 (opposed) to 62 (in favor). Although a significant majority of legislators voted against the proposed measure, only 50 votes are required to move a citizen-initiated proposal forward. The measure must be similarly approved in the constitutional convention in 2007 in order to be on the ballot in 2008.

Statement by Matt Foreman, Executive Director National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

"A minority of Massachusetts legislators approved sending to the voters a mean-spirited constitutional amendment seeking to end marriage equality for same-sex couples in the Bay State.

"It is always wrong to put the rights of a minority up for a popular vote and we are gratified that a strong majority of the Legislature voted against doing just that.

"We share with our colleagues in Massachusetts a deep dismay, and yet we are also unbowed in our belief in the fundamental social good of marriage rights for all qualified couples.

"We stand with MassEquality and our other partners in Massachusetts, ready to work with them to defeat the amendment when it is next considered in the new legislative session. Marriage equality must and will be protected and preserved in Massachusetts."

Background

Since the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled that the state's constitution, the Declaration of Rights, required that same-sex couples be permitted to marry and those marriages began on May 17, 2004, approximately 8,500 same-sex couples in the state have married. Opponents of marriage equality have sought a statewide ballot measure that would amend the Declaration of Rights to prohibit same-sex marriage. A legislator-proposed amendment to that effect was rejected in 2005. In 2006, a citizen-initiated proposal to that effect came before the Legislature sitting as a constitutional convention. Citizen-initiated proposals to amend the state constitution require approval of 25 percent of the legislators, or 50 votes, in two consecutive constitutional conventions. The next constitutional convention occurs this year.

The Task Force has worked in partnership with MassEquality and other organizations on a wide range of activities to preserve marriage equality in Massachusetts, including making direct cash grants to MassEquality, serving as the lead organizer in a dozen major door-to-door voter canvasses and in filling hundreds of phone-banking shifts, and organizing and staffing a program involving nearly 3,000 volunteers to identify pro-gay voters.