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EDITORIAL

Uphill Toward Equality

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The fight in New Jersey to legalize same-sex marriage cleared a crucial hurdle on Monday night, and it is now time for the rest of the state's lawmakers to end a grievous violation of this nation's promise of equal rights. The same-sex marriage bill was approved by the Judiciary Committee of the State Senate on Monday night following a day of emotionally charged testimony.

The fate of the bill was in doubt late Wednesday when [the Senate postponed a vote](#) set for Thursday and sent it back to the General Assembly for more hearings. We're not sure why they are necessary at this point and hope the delay does not rule out a vote before the next governor takes office on Jan. 19.

It was disappointing that only a single Republican on the committee, William Baroni of Mercer, was willing to stand up for the measure. And the two ranking Democrats on the panel — Chairman Paul Sarlo of Bergen and Vice Chairman John Girgenti of Passaic — also voted against extending a fundamental right to gay men and lesbians. But the narrowness of [the 7-to-6 vote](#) should not obscure the fact that it was the first time any legislative body in New Jersey had voted for same-sex marriage.

Supporters of the measure are still hunting for the votes needed for final approval. Much now depends on whether Democrats — including the majority leader, Stephen Sweeney, who will become the Senate president in January — can rise above overblown fears about the next election if they join in discarding inadequate civil unions in favor of full marriage equality.

A negative vote could delay justice for four or even eight years. Christopher Christie, the Republican who defeated Gov. Jon Corzine, has said he would veto any legalization bill, making passage in the current lame-duck session an urgent matter.

For Democrats truly committed to treating all of New Jersey's families fairly, this should not be a hard vote. A recent Rutgers-Eagleton poll showed that New Jersey voters would accept the change.

As Monday's hearing showed, there is agreement on both sides that the state's civil union law is not working. Wavering Democrats should worry less about political tactics and more about addressing that problem.

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