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NJ Senate passes bill on gay marriage

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By Lisa Berkman / Staff Writer |  0 comments

TRENTON — The New Jersey Senate passed the bill on same-sex marriage 24 to 16 Monday in the State House, marking another step toward legalizing gay marriage in the state.

New Jersey could join Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York and Vermont as an equal marriage state. The bill moves on Thursday to the Assembly.

An Eagleton Institute study conducted from Feb. 9-11 polled 914 New Jersey adults and found that 54 percent of Garden State voters favored legalizing gay marriage.

Even with a majority of N.J. voters supporting the legalization of gay marriage, Gov. Chris Christie plans to veto the bill when it reaches him on Tuesday and call for a November referendum.

Despite the governor's veto plan, Senate President Stephen Sweeney encouraged members of the legislature to gather enough votes for an override, which occurs after a two-thirds vote from both the Assembly and the Senate.

He said legislatures oppose the bill to gain future campaign support from those who are against gay marriage.

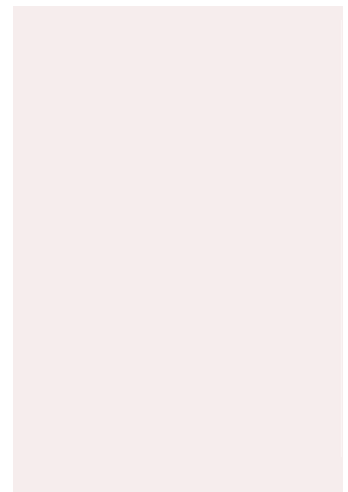
"Isn't it more important that we did something that truly changed peoples' lives for the better?" Sweeney said. "I'm talking about real true change about how we treat each other as human beings."

The 2006 Supreme Court case, *Lewis v. Harris*, granted homosexual couples equal protection. But Sen. Barbara Buono, D-18, said it is time to step it up a notch and legalize gay marriage.

"Liberty and justice were established not just for heterosexual men and women, but for all," Buono said. "We cannot expect to move forward as a nation if we leave our brothers and sisters behind."

Carrie Diona, a Barnegat resident, said she hopes the law will pass so she can finally marry her soul mate.

"A civil union is not the same. It doesn't work and it's not equality," she said. "I should have the same rights as another person to get married."



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Buono said she believes a civil union is not enough, because the notion of separate but equal is embedded within it. She said a man and a woman could meet at the State House and get a piece of paper that says their married, gaining all of the benefits that come with marriage.

“But two people — whether they’ve known each for two years or their whole life — if they want the same thing, but they’re the same gender, they have the burden to prove their commitment to one another,” Buono said.

Sen. Gerald Cardinale, R-39, was the only one to speak against the bill at the forum. He said the bill could destroy traditional marriage, which dates back thousands of years, and possibly open the door for incest.

“This bill opens Pandora’s box,” Cardinale said. “The unintended consequences could be more than we can imagine or manage.”

Moshe Bressler, head of Garden State Parents for Moral Values, said the legislature is destroying the moral culture in the public sphere.

“Gay marriage is not a right, it’s a civil wrong,” he said. “They have a right to privacy, they can do what they want, but to tell me how I should view marriage, that’s a front to religion.”

Thomas McGrath Jr., an Episcopalian from Gloucester City, said religion and tolerance are not mutually exclusive.

“The more you study the Bible, if a professional guides you through these interpretations, I think you’ll see that we’re on the right side,” McGrath said.

Buono said the bill does not pose a threat to marriage between two heterosexuals.

“Giving gay and lesbian couples the right to marry will not change the quality of my relationship with my husband, Martin,” she said. “I would not love him less.”

Christie proposed a referendum on gay marriage in January, so New Jersey residents could decide for themselves whether it should be legal.

Fifty-three percent of state voters support Christie’s decision to vote on the legality of gay marriage. While 40 percent support Newark Mayor Cory Booker’s position that gay marriage is a civil rights issue that should not be decided by voters.

A majority of those who support gay marriage want a referendum on the issue, according to an Eagleton poll.

Democratic legislatures made gay marriage a top priority, but fewer than 25 percent of voters say gay marriage is one of the most important issues facing New Jersey.

“It may be that given several polls showing majority support among voters, supporters of same-sex marriage think it would win in November,” said Eagleton Poll Director David Redlawsk in an Eagleton press release. “But in the face of a likely intensive campaign from opponents, this could be wishful thinking.”

Sen. Loretta Weinberg, D-37, who sponsored the bill, said the issue of gay marriage should not be decided by a referendum, because representatives of Congress are meant to decide upon such legislation.

“New Jersey has never adopted equal protection and rights to people through initiative and referendum,” Weinberg said. “The last time it was tried in 1915, voters rejected a woman’s right to vote on a 2-to-1 margin. Women didn’t get the vote until the ratification of the amendment achieved through congressional action.”

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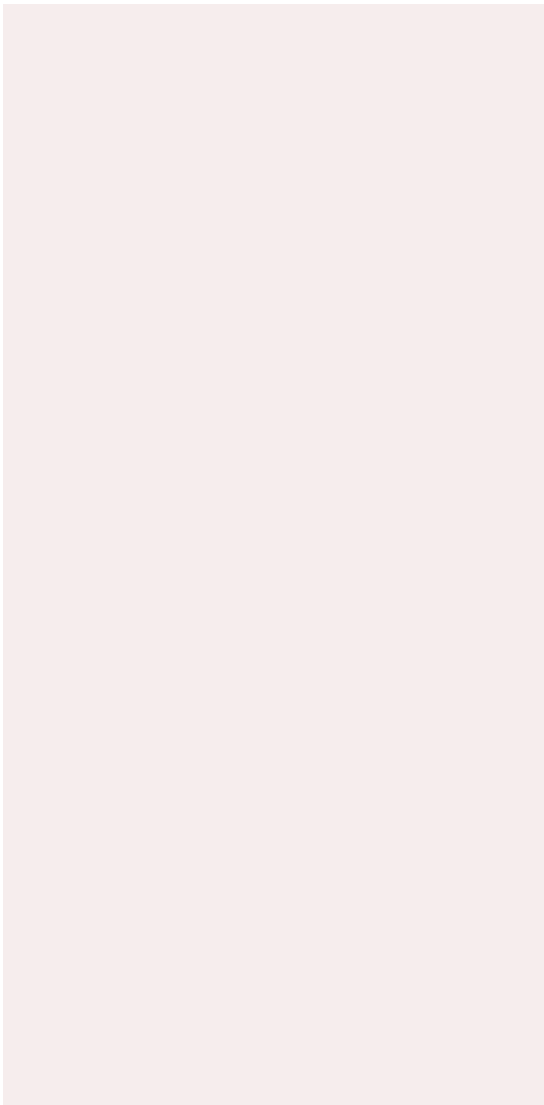
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