

Lawmakers in Washington state pass bill legalizing same-sex marriage

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Members of the Knights of Columbus protest outside the capitol in Olympia, Wash., to protest a bill that would legalize same-sex marriage in the state. The House passed the measure that day and the Senate approved it Feb. 1. It now it goes on to Gov. Chris Gregoire for her signature. (CNS photo/Robert Sorbo, Reuters)

SEATTLE -- Members of the House of Representatives in Washington state voted Feb. 8 to legalize same-sex marriage, and Gov. Christine Gregoire was expected to sign the bill into law by mid-February.

The vote came one day after a federal appeals court in California struck down that state's voter-approved ban on same-sex marriage.

In Washington, the legislation passed with a 56-42 vote in the House. On Feb. 1, the state Senate approved it 28-21.

Once it becomes law, Washington will be the seventh state in the nation, along with the District of Columbia, where same-sex marriage is legal.

Several Republicans in the House argued against the bill, saying that it went against the tradition of marriage.

In Jan. 23 testimony before a Senate committee, Seattle Archbishop J. Peter Sartain urged lawmakers to oppose the measure "based on the grave challenge this legislation poses to the common good. By attempting to redefine marriage, it ignores the origin, purpose and value of marriage to individuals, families and society."

In a statement released Jan. 13, the state's three Catholic bishops called on Washington citizens to support traditional marriage and contact their state senator and representatives to urge them to "defend the current legal definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman."

The same-sex marriage law will take effect 90 days after the governor signs it, but opponents have promised to fight it with a ballot measure that would allow voters to overturn it. If opponents gather 120,000 signatures, the measure will be put to a referendum in November.

The bill was modeled after similar legislation approved by New York in June, which allows churches and religious groups to choose not to perform same-sex marriages and to deny same-sex couples access to their facilities for weddings.

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