

# **Vermont legalizes same-sex marriage; D.C. recognizes same-sex unions**

BURLINGTON, Vt. – Vermont legislators voted to override the governor's veto of same-sex marriage legislation April 7, making the state the fourth to allow same-sex marriage and the first to do so without a court order.

The same day, the District of Columbia Council voted to recognize same-sex unions formalized in other states. Both votes came less than a week after the Iowa Supreme Court's unanimous decision to legalize gay marriage by striking down a state law defining marriage as a union of one man and one woman.

The Vermont law will allow same-sex marriages in the state beginning in September. Same-sex marriages are legal in Connecticut and Massachusetts, and will begin in Iowa in late April.

The two houses of the Vermont Legislature voted in early April on the same-sex-marriage legislation. The votes were four short of the number needed to override a veto and Gov. Jim Douglas vetoed the measure April 6. Some legislators changed their votes April 7 to override the governor's veto in a 100-49 vote.

During a March hearing about the same-sex marriage legislation, called the Freedom to Marry Act, Bishop Salvatore R. Matano of Burlington defended the church's opposition to same-sex marriages, saying it has been the Catholic Church's "consistent teaching ... that marriage is the union of man and woman."

He said the church's opposition to same-sex marriage was "not rooted in hatred, bigotry, a lack of compassion or understanding, or discrimination," but rather arose from a "duty to uphold and to defend the traditional definition of marriage as it has been upheld and revered over the ages."

"The union of husband and wife is a distinct vocation and using the law to alter or to redefine marriage is an injustice to those who have embraced this state in life and

negates its long history of benefit to society and the justified acknowledgment that it has received from the very beginning of history,” the bishop said.

In the District of Columbia, council members voted 12-0 April 7 to approve a measure that would recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states. It was an amendment to an unrelated bill.

The council is expected to hold a final vote in early May before sending the measure to Mayor Adrian Fenty. If he approves it, the bill will be sent to Congress for a required review and a vote.

An April 7 statement released by the Archdiocese of Washington asked elected officials to “respect the definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman.”

The statement said the archdiocese is “deeply concerned” about the move to “equate same-sex relationships with marriage.”

“By legally equating unmarried couples with married couples, this bill erodes marriage,” the statement said.

Meanwhile, in California the state Supreme Court last May overturned a statute barring same-sex marriage, but a constitutional amendment to define marriage as between a man and a woman was approved by voters in November. That state’s Supreme Court is to issue a decision on a constitutional challenge to the November ballot initiative.