

Beat: News

Federal judge rules same-sex couples can wed now in Chicago

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USPA News - A federal judge on Friday ruled that same-sex couples in Cook County will not have to wait until June to get married, when a law that legalizes gay marriages in Illinois will take effect, officials said. The federal court order by U.S. District Judge Sharon Johnson Coleman will allow same-sex couples in Cook County, which includes Chicago, to get married more than three full months before the June 1 date set by the Illinois Legislature last year. Cook County Clerk David Orr had filed a brief in support of a lawsuit which argued that same-sex couples should not have to wait until the state law takes effect.

Judge Coleman said committed same-sex couples have "suffered enough from the denial of their right to marry," and no opposition was presented to the court. "It is so ordered," the judge stated in the ruling. Orr said his office would begin issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples immediately and even extended business hours. "I'm thrilled that same sex couples who want to get married won't have to wait any longer," Orr said. "We are very excited to celebrate this historic milestone with every loving couple from today onward." Orr said the Downtown Bureau of Vital Records would remain open an extra two hours on Friday - until 7:00 p.m. local time - to accommodate any couples who may want to get a license after work. Only the downtown office would be issuing licenses to same-sex couples on Friday, but all other offices will begin issuing licenses on Monday, he said. Marriage licenses take effect the next calendar day after being issued and are valid for 60 days. Orr suggested that couples who have a summer wedding planned should not rush to get a license because it may expire before the set wedding date. Couples who already have an Illinois civil union license will be waived the \$60 license fee. However, couples who want to convert their prior civil union date to a marriage will have to wait until the originally effective date - June 1 - because those terms were not addressed in Judge Coleman's order. Illinois Governor Pat Quinn signed a gay marriage bill into law in November which stated same sex marriages can be performed in the state beginning June 1, 2014. Two women, both in their 60s and who had entered into a civil union in 2011, challenged the effective date in federal court last year. One of them had been battling breast cancer for 17 years and was advised that she had little time left to live. The women sued the U.S. District Court and requested a marriage license immediately. Given the special circumstances, U.S. District Judge Thomas M. Durkin granted the request. The couple wed privately in November. In December, Judge Coleman already ruled that same-sex couples in which one of the partners suffers from a life-threatening illness is allowed to marry early. "This Court can conceive of no reason why the public interest would be disserved by allowing a few couples facing terminal illness to wed a few months earlier than the timeline would currently allow," she ruled. Her ruling Friday applies to all same-sex couples in Cook County.

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