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Massachusetts defeats anti-marriage amendment

Proposed amendment would have rolled back marriage equality for same-sex couples

by Brad Luna and Donald Miller

BOSTON, Mass. — During a joint session June 14, Massachusetts lawmakers voted 151 to 45 to defeat a measure that would have placed a discriminatory, anti-marriage constitutional amendment before voters on the November 2008 ballot. The proposed amendment threatened to undo the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court's historic 2003 decision making the state the first to recognize marriage equality for same-sex couples.

"Democrats in Massachusetts overwhelmingly recognize that every family is strengthened when the legal responsibilities of civil marriage are extended to all couples," said Jo Wyrick, Executive Director of the National Stonewall Democrats. "These legal obligations serve society by protecting children, stabilizing homes and securing relationships. We are proud that Democrats in Massachusetts fully support values which protect families in the Bay State."

"This proposed constitutional amendment was a misguided attempt to put people's equal rights to a vote. We are grateful that the overwhelming majority of Massachusetts legislators rejected this divisive measure," said Human Rights Campaign President Joe Solmonese. "Today's vote is a reaffirmation of Massachusetts' proud record of choosing equality over discrimination. For the past three years, loving and committed same-sex couples have enjoyed the equal right to marry in Massachusetts. Despite the doomsday predictions of opponents of equality, the sky hasn't fallen, and no one's marriage has been threatened. To the contrary, the institution of marriage has been strengthened as same-sex couples and their families have enjoyed the equal rights and protections they deserve under Massachusetts law. The Legislature's action ensures that they will continue to enjoy those equal rights and protections."

The Massachusetts state constitution requires that just one-fourth of elected legislators approve an "initiative amendment" (a proposed constitutional amendment intro-



Still safe: same-sex couples continue to share in wedded bliss in the state of Massachusetts

duced in the Legislature by initiative petition signed by a specified number of voters), in consecutive joint legislative sessions before the proposed amendment goes to the voters. Opponents of equality gathered signatures to place the proposed anti-marriage amendment before the Legislature by initiative petition.

Last January 62 of the state's 200 legislators voted in favor of the proposed amendment, which would have defined marriage "only as the union of one man and one woman." If 50 or more legislators had voted in favor of the proposed amendment this time, it would have been placed before the voters on the 2008 ballot.

Solmonese added: "We hope that this decisive vote puts to an end, once and for all, attempts to bypass the Supreme Judicial Court's historic decision in the *Goodridge* case. The system worked; the court did its job by applying

the state constitution to guarantee equal protection for all Massachusetts citizens and legislators did their job by defeating the anti-marriage amendment, which sought to return same-sex couples to second-class status. Now, we look forward to seeing other states join Massachusetts in recognizing marriage equality and putting an end to discrimination against same-sex couples and their families."

The victory for same-sex couples comes as other states are considering providing equal marriage rights to same-sex couples under state law. Earlier this month, the California state Assembly passed a bill that would provide same-sex couples with the equal right to marry under state law. Marriage equality legislation has also been introduced and is still pending in Illinois, New Jersey, New York and Rhode Island.

Reaction from opponents of same-sex marriage was predictable.

Former Gov. Mitt Romney, who is running for president, said in a statement that the vote is "a regrettable setback." He also seized on the opportunity to make the issue part of his presidential platform by indicating his support to pass a national amendment banning same-sex marriage.

"Marriage is an institution that goes to the heart of our society," he said, "and our leaders can no longer abdicate their responsibility."

On a more positive note, one of the representatives who switched his vote to block the ballot initiative had this to say:

"I reflected on the many [gay] couples I met and their families, and I just couldn't bear the thought of what we'd be doing to them over the next couple of years," said state Rep. Richard Ross (R-Wrentham). ▀

Reggae stars renounce homophobia

Beenie Man, Sizzla and Capleton sign historic agreement to stop 'murder music'

by Brett Locke

LONDON — Three of the world's top reggae/dancehall singers have renounced homophobia and condemned violence against lesbians and gay men.

Beenie Man, Sizzla and Capleton had previously released anti-gay hate songs, including incitements to murder LGBT people.

They have now signed on in support of the Reggae Compassionate Act in a deal brokered with top reggae promoters and Stop Murder Music activists.

The agreement follows the three-year-long

Stop Murder Music campaign, which resulted in the cancellation of hundreds of the singers' concerts and sponsorship deals, causing them income losses



Beenie Man, Sizzla (center) and Capleton say they'll no longer perform songs with anti-gay lyrics.

British gay human rights group OutRage. Tatchell is coordinator of the worldwide Stop Murder Music campaign. He helped negotiate the deal with the three singers.

"The singers' rejection of homophobia and sexism is an important milestone. We rejoice at their new commitment to music without prejudice," said Tatchell.

"This deal will have a huge, positive impact in Jamaica and the Caribbean. The media coverage will generate public awareness and debate; breaking down ignorance and undermining homophobia.

"Having these major reggae stars renounce homophobia will influence their fans and the wider public to rethink bigoted attitudes. The beneficial effect on young black straight men will be immense," he said.

This view is mirrored by fellow Stop Murder Music campaigner, Dennis L. Carney, vice-chair of the Black Gay Mens Advisory Group (BGMAG) in London. Carney is of Jamaican descent and played a leading role in negotiating the Reggae Compassionate Act. "I am thrilled that Beenie Man, Sizzla and Capleton have signed up to this historic agreement with the Stop Murder Music campaign,"

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