

National/Global

Maryland gov't approves marriage

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — Mirroring a landmark Maryland House of Delegates vote from the previous week, on Feb. 23 the state Senate approved a same-sex marriage equality bill introduced by Gov. Martin O'Malley.

The Civil Marriage Protection Act will allow committed gay and lesbian couples to obtain a marriage license while providing religious exemptions for churches and other religious institutions. For instance, clergy do not have to perform any marriage they do not agree with.

Still the fight isn't over. Under Maryland law, virtually any piece of legislation can be subject to a statewide voter referendum where the measure is either upheld or overturned. Opponents of marriage equality are expected to quickly begin obtaining the signatures necessary to place the law on the general election ballot in November.

A January poll by the *Washington Post* indicated a majority of Marylanders support same-sex marriage equality.

— D.S.

N.J. giveth, Gov. Christie taketh away

TRENTON, N.J. — After the New Jersey Assembly passed same-sex marriage equality legislation Feb. 16, N.J. Gov. Chris Christie kept his vow and vetoed the bill the very next day.

"We are disappointed that Gov. Christie did not do what is right for New Jersey families, but we are not discouraged," said Hayley Gorenberg, Lambda Legal Deputy Legal Director. "There are many roads to justice, and Gov. Christie's veto is an unfortunate detour to

marriage equality for New Jersey's same-sex couples and their families. We'll continue to make our case for equality with our plaintiffs in court."

Meanwhile, leaders of LGBT rights group Garden State Equality say that over the next two years they will work to gather the votes needed to override the veto.

— D.S.

Judge rules against DOMA

SAN FRANCISCO, Calif. — U.S. District Court Judge Jeffrey S. White ruled Feb. 22 that the federal *Defense of Marriage Act* (DOMA) is unconstitutional, declaring that the statute violates the U.S. Constitution's guarantee of equality. The case was filed on behalf of Karen Golinski, a federal court employee denied spousal health coverage for her wife.

Judge White's ruling is the latest victory in a battle that began in 2008, when Golinski, a 20-year employee of the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, sought to enroll her wife, Amy Cunningham, in the employee health plan.

It is the first DOMA-related ruling since U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder announced that the Department of Justice had determined DOMA was unconstitutional and would no longer defend it, and the majority leadership of the U.S. House of Representatives hired outside counsel to defend the law. A similar ruling holding DOMA unconstitutional in a separate case is on appeal in the First Circuit.

— D.S.

Job ordinances are no burden

LOS ANGELES, Calif. — Local ordinances that require city and county contractors to prohibit sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination protect thousands of workers

without burdening governments or businesses, according to a new study from the UCLA School of Law's Williams Institute.

The local governments in the study reported widespread compliance among contractors and very little, if any, resistance to adopting LGBT-related employment policies. Further, no locality reported that any employees had filed complaints of sexual orientation or gender identity discrimination after the policies were implemented.

The survey responses also indicate that the laws are not burdensome or costly for the agencies to implement and enforce. No locality reported that it had to hire additional staff to enforce these ordinances, or that there was any cost associated in adding sexual orientation and gender identity to existing non-discrimination policies and practices. Currently, only 21 states and the District of Columbia include sexual orientation or gender identity in their statewide non-discrimination laws.

— D.S.

School district must offer web equality

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — A federal district court ruled Feb. 15 that the Camdenton R-III School District must stop censoring positive LGBT web content through its discriminatory filtering software. The ruling orders the district to not block content based on the viewpoints expressed by the website.

The American Civil Liberties Union and the ACLU of Eastern Missouri filed a lawsuit against the district in August 2011 after repeated warnings that its custom-built filtering software discriminates against pro-LGBT content. The filter has a category that blocks LGBT-supportive information, including hundreds of websites that are not sexually

explicit in any way. The filter does, however, allow students to view anti-LGBT sites that condemn homosexuality or oppose legal protections for LGBT people.

The lawsuit was filed on behalf of a Camdenton High School student and LGBT organizations whose websites are blocked by the filter: PFLAG National (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), the Matthew Shepard Foundation, Campus Pride and DignityUSA, a Catholic LGBT organization.

— D.S.

Study predicts Aussie wedding \$\$\$

CANBERRA, Australia — Extending marriage to Australian same-sex couples would boost the country's economy by \$161 million over three years, according to a new report published by the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law. This estimate is based on a projection that 54 percent (or 17,820) of Australia's approximately 33,000 same-sex couples would marry.

Tasmania stands to claim a large share of that \$161 million should it become the first state to allow same-sex couples to marry — which multiple signs seem to point toward.

The figures in the report draw upon recent surveys, estimating the total number of Australian same-sex couples and the number of those interested in marriage. Notably, the estimates in the report are conservative compared to other estimates because they only include spending by resident couples. They do not include spending by wedding guests, or wedding or tourism spending by couples traveling to Australia to marry. One recent study that took this additional spending into account estimated an economic boost of \$742 million.

— D.S.

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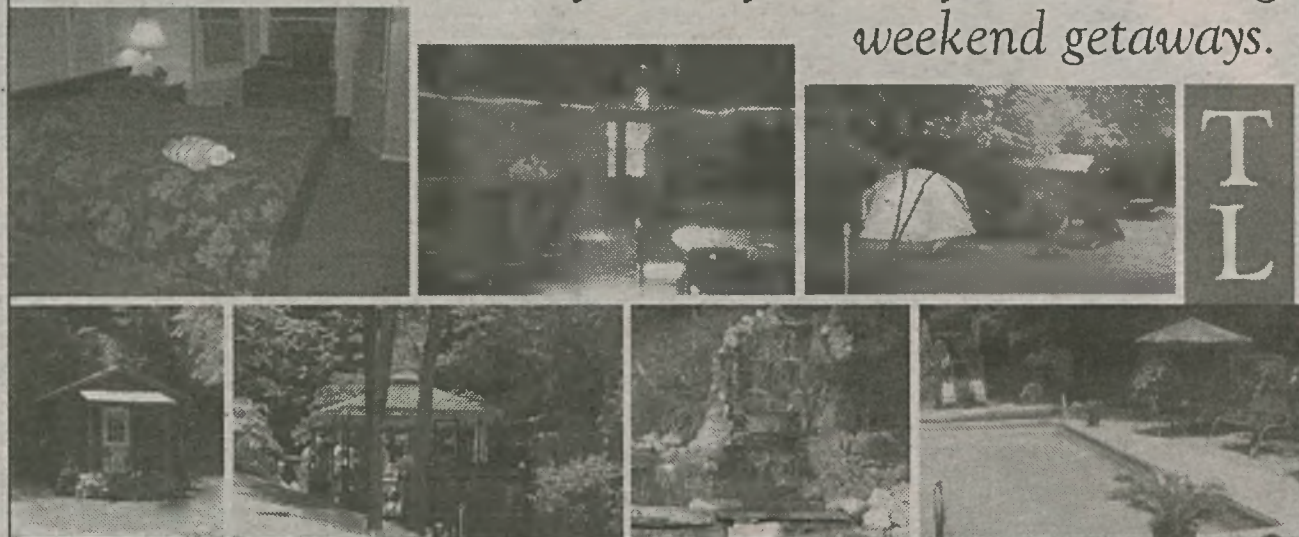


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