



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on May 21, 2009

Same-sex Marriage Bill Stalls in N.H.

The legislation establishing marriage “regardless of gender” in New Hampshire specified that no member of the clergy would be required to participate in or provide any service for a same-sex marriage. That legislation, however, has yet to be forwarded to the governor. Lynch has requested expansion of the religious exemption to cover any religious organization or association and any non-profit agency working with a religious organization or association. The governor’s proposal would also protect from legal jeopardy individuals working for — or managed, supervised, or directed by — a religious organization or association or a non-profit working in conjunction with a religious group. That bill passed the Senate on a party-line vote with all 14 Democrats voting for the measure and all 10 Republicans voting against it. But it barely lost in the House, 186 to 188.



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The legislation is not dead, however. An attempt to kill the bill for this session was also defeated. Instead, the House voted 207-168 to send the bill to a conference committee for House and Senate members to work out their differences. Final action is expected before this year’s session ends sometime this spring or early summer. If New Hampshire adopts a “gay” marriage law this session, it will be the fifth among the six New England states to do so. Only Rhode Island has neither passed nor has on the table such legislation. Outside the region, only Iowa has same-sex marriage, established there by a ruling of that state’s Supreme Court in April.

While many of the opponents of same-sex marriage are traditionalists with strong religious convictions, they opposed the protection for religious organizations that the New Hampshire governor proposed because its defeat would mean Lynch would veto the “gay” marriage bill. Few had a chance to speak at the public hearing on the governor’s proposal Tuesday, since the Senate Judiciary Committee allowed only 15 minutes for the hearing before recommending passage by a 3-2 vote. Kevin Smith, executive director of the Cornerstone Policy Research (CPR), a conservative group staunchly opposed to same-sex marriage, told the committee that the proposal would not protect justices of the peace or independent business people, such as wedding photographers or caterers who might have moral or religious objections to providing services at events related to a same-sex marriage. Individuals or businesses that refuse service may be charged with violation of the state’s anti-discrimination law if same-sex marriage becomes law, he said.



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Today, CPR-Action, the organization's political committee, issued a statement calling on the governor to veto the same-sex marriage legislation, since the House did not pass the amendment Lynch said was necessary to get by his veto pen. "We know the House rejected his language, so what is he waiting for?" the committee asked. CPR Action is urging citizens to call the governor's office "and ask that he keep his word to veto the bill!"

Lynch, a Democrat in his third two-year term as governor, has said little about the controversy since asking for the expanded religious exemptions. In a brief radio interview this morning on Concord radio station WTPL-FM, he seemed eager to change the subject. "I'm really focused on the budget," the governor said. "We still have a budget to get together in the next 30 days."



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