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Gays Sue Connecticut Over Same Sex Unions



Aug 26, 2004 7:52 am US/Eastern (1010 WINS) (HARTFORD) Seven gay couples recently denied marriage licenses in Connecticut filed a lawsuit Wednesday challenging the constitutionality of the state's marriage laws, which exclude same-sex couples.

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All seven couples applied for the licenses in Madison, a shoreline town in the central part of the state.

"In the end, this is a case about real people with real families asking their government to treat them fairly," said Mary Bonauto, a lawyer representing Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders, or GLAD, the same group that successfully challenged marriage laws in Massachusetts.

The lawsuit, filed in New Haven Superior Court, names town officials in Madison and Department of Public Health Commissioner J. Robert Galvin. The public health agency handles the administration of marriage licenses in the state.

Plaintiff Suzanne Artis and her partner, Geraldine, said they have been together for a decade and have three children. The legal rights that come with marriage would help them protect their family, both women said.

"We're looking forward to having marriage protect our love," Suzanne Artis said.

Attorney General Richard Blumenthal will represent the state. In a statement, he said that the legislature has not authorized the issuance of marriage licenses to same-sex couples in the state, or approved same-sex marriage ceremonies.

"Several statutes and court decisions indicate clearly that the General Assembly has authorized a marriage relationship only between a man and a woman," Blumenthal said.

"These laws, like any duly enacted state statutes, are entitled to a presumption of constitutionality."

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Bonauto, the lead attorney on the case, said she expects the case to take three years. She was the attorney behind the landmark Massachusetts case that led to the legalization of gay marriage, beginning May 17. She was also involved in legal action in Vermont, where same-sex couples can now seek civil unions.

Katy and Kristen Gossman of Meriden, who were married in Massachusetts in May, are plaintiffs in a different case challenging a 1913 law in Massachusetts barring out-of-state gay couples from marrying there. They said they hope to see the marriage laws change in Connecticut so they can save their own marriage.

"We're happy about this lawsuit because if we win then there would be no questions asked about our marriage license in Massachusetts," said Katy Gossman, a special agent with the FBI.

Connecticut same-sex marriage advocates have resisted going to court for years, instead working to change state law.

Anne Stanback, president of Love Makes a Family, a same-sex marriage advocacy group in Connecticut, said that will not change. However, her organization is supporting the lawsuit.

"We have always said we would never close the door on supporting a lawsuit in Connecticut, but that we wanted to begin the process in the legislature," said Stanback. She also said her coalition plans to lobby for a same-sex marriage bill when the new legislative session begins in January.

"We strongly support the lawsuit by GLAD," she said. "We believe something as important as the fundamental right to marriage must be fought on all fronts."

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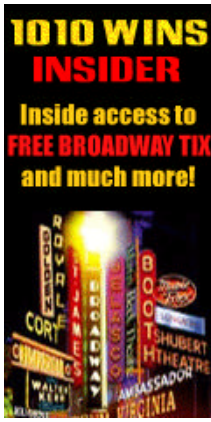
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