



Landmark Ruling on Gay Marriage

Oklahomans for Equality (OkEq) is thrilled with Thursday's ruling in a Boston federal court that the federal ban on gay marriage is unconstitutional. U.S. District Judge Joseph Tauro ruled in favor of gay couples' rights, stating that the Defense of Marriage Act denies benefits such as Medicaid to gay couples who are married in Massachusetts.

Same-sex unions have been legal in that state since 2004. Judge Tauro said the act forces Massachusetts to discriminate against its own residents in order to be eligible for federal funding in federal-state partnerships. Tauro also ruled that the act violates the equal protection clause of the U.S. Constitution.

Although the ruling is not binding on other federal courts, it may serve as a precedent in the lawsuit filed in Tulsa federal court by two area couples in 2004. That case, known as Bishop v. Oklahoma, is currently awaiting a ruling in U.S. District Court. The plaintiffs, couples Mary Bishop and Sharon Baldwin of Broken Arrow and Sue Barton and Gay Phillips of Tulsa, are challenging both Oklahoma's ban on same-gender marriage and the federal Defense of Marriage Act.

Barton and Phillips, who have been together for 25 years, are married in both California and Canada, where same-sex marriages are recognized, and have a civil union in Vermont. The overturning of DOMA, if upheld at the Supreme Court, would allow the United States government to recognize their marriage.

"This is a great day for American citizens who seek equal protection under the U.S. Constitution," Barton said in response to the Massachusetts ruling.

Bishop and Baldwin, both fourth-generation Oklahomans, have been together for 13 years and want to be married in Oklahoma. Their part of the Oklahoma lawsuit challenges the state's constitutional amendment that limits marriage to couples of opposite genders.

Bishop said. "We are so pleased that Judge Tauro agrees that DOMA violates the Constitution, and we hope that other judges in other districts across the country will agree that state laws banning gay marriage are also unconstitutional."

"OkEq will be watching how this unfolds very closely. This will likely have a very positive and direct connection to how the U.S. District Court rules closer to home." says Kris Wilmes, Director of Advocacy for Oklahomans for Equality.

A special fund has been established at Oklahomans for Equality to help cover legal fees associated with the ongoing Oklahoma Same Gender Marriage Lawsuit. You may make your donation at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center or On-Line by visiting www.okeq.org. Please designate your tax deductible gift "Marriage Equality".

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Oklahomans for Equality (OkEq) seeks equal rights for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) individuals and families through advocacy, education, programs, alliances, and the operation of the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center