

Beat: Miscellaneous

U.S. judge strikes down Mississippi's gay marriage ban

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USPA News - A federal judge has overturned a ban on same-sex marriages in the U.S. state of Mississippi, striking down a voter-approved amendment that defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman but putting the order on hold for two weeks to allow the state to appeal. Judge Carlton Reeves, of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi, said Tuesday that the state cannot deny same-sex couples the marriage rights and responsibilities it holds out to opposite-sex couples and their children.

"Mississippi's statute and constitutional amendment violate the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution," he said in his ruling. Reeves ordered the state to stop enforcing those parts of the Mississippi Code and the Mississippi Constitution that deny same-sex couples the right to marriage, but issued a stay for two weeks as the state plans to appeal the ruling to the 5th U.S. Court of Appeals. In deciding to overturn the ban, Reeves said the 14th Amendment operates to remove the blinders of inequality. "Though we cherish our traditional values, they must give way to constitutional wisdom," he said. "Mississippi's traditional beliefs about gay and lesbian citizens led it to defy that wisdom by taking away fundamental rights owed to every citizen. It is time to restore those rights." The judge added: "Mississippi continues to change in ways its people could not anticipate even 10 years ago. Allowing same-sex couples to marry, however, presents no harm to anyone. At the very least, it has the potential to support families and provide stability for children. This court joins the vast majority of federal courts to conclude that same-sex couples and the children they raise are equal before the law." Tuesday's ruling follows similar rulings in a number of other U.S. states over the past few years as the public's support for same-sex marriage continues to increase across the country, with now 36 states and the District of Columbia either already performing them or bans having been overturned. A Gallup poll in 1996 found that only 27 percent of Americans were in favor of allowing marriages between people of the same gender, but the latest survey conducted in May 2014 found that 55 percent of Americans are now in favor of same-sex marriage. Nearly 8 in 10 young adults are in favor of legal gay marriage, the latest poll showed. Last year, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), the 1996 law that blocked federal recognition of same-sex marriages and denied more than 1,100 federal benefits to married individuals in same-sex relationships. It was signed into law by President Bill Clinton in September 1996, but he later withdrew his support for the law.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

United Press Association, Inc.
3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA
(702) 943.0321 Local
(702) 943.0233 Facsimile

info@unitedpressassociation.org
info@gna24.com
www.gna24.com