



## Illinois One Step Closer to Civil Unions

By [365gay.com](http://365gay.com)

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Chicago, IL - Illinois is on its way to joining New Jersey, Connecticut and Vermont as states that offer the marriage alternative of civil unions to same-sex couples. The House Human Services Committee passed House Bill 1826, also known as the Religious Freedom and Civil Union Act, on Wednesday by a vote of 5-4.

The legislation, sponsored by state Rep. Greg Harris (D-Chicago), extends a comprehensive package of basic legal protections and responsibilities offered through marriage to couples, including same sex couples, who enter into a civil union in Illinois. House Bill 1826 also codifies existing constitutional protections for religious denominations across Illinois, reinforcing the right of any religious organization to determine those marriage ceremonies that denomination will recognize or perform.

"Illinois is a heartland state but has always been a leader in civil rights and social justice issues," Harris said. "It's the right thing to do."

Gay groups were quick to applaud Harris' efforts and the passage of the bill by the House Human Services Committee.

"This comprehensive civil union bill has a simple underlying purpose: to ensure that all Illinois families have the opportunity to share the same legal protections and the same legal responsibilities," John A. Knight, director of the ACLU of Illinois Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights Project, said in a release. "Our friends, neighbors and colleagues who face the everyday challenges of life without these basic legal protections must be pleased to see this legislation introduced in the Illinois General Assembly."

In a separate statement, Jim Bennett, regional director of Lambda Legal's Midwest Regional Office in Chicago, said: "Lambda Legal applauds the bill's authors for addressing some of the serious threats that same-sex couples face everyday when they can't get married. By not even offering the most basic protections, Illinois views same-sex couples, some together for decades, as strangers under the law.

"The way to correct this injustice is to treat all of us fairly and equally—by allowing committed same-sex couples to marry," he added. "But until we reach the goal of marriage equality, efforts such as House Bill 1826 help reduce the harms to loving families by offering some critical legal protections that help our state take better care of all our citizens."

Illinois' same-sex couples could find themselves one step closer to marriage equality should the bill make its way to the desk of Gov. Rod Blagojevich, who has already indicated his support of such legislation.