

DC issues same-sex union licences

More than 120 gay couples have received marriage licences in the US capital, Washington DC.

The District of Columbia became the sixth US jurisdiction to allow same-sex unions after the Supreme Court threw out a last-minute legal challenge.

Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont also issue same-sex licences.

Many queued for hours outside Washington's marriage bureau to be among the first to get their licences.

The BBC's Madeleine Morris, in Washington, says that the couples were motivated both by a desire to marry as soon as they could, and a fear that further legal challenges could overturn the decision to allow same-sex marriages.

'Like Christmas morning'

In November 2008, California residents voted in a referendum to overturn a state supreme court decision six months earlier which had legalised gay marriage.

Sinjoyla Townsend, 41 and her partner of 12 years, Angelisa Young, 47, claimed the first spot in line outside the city's Moultrie courthouse.

"It's like waking up Christmas morning," said Ms Young. "It's really like a dream come true."

Rocky Galloway, 50, received a licence to marry his partner of six years, Reggie Stanley, also 50.

"This means our family is finally the same as any other family in DC and that is important to us," Mr Galloway told AFP news agency.

The earliest many couples will be able to marry is Tuesday, due to a processing period of three business days for all licence applicants.

Gay marriage is a controversial issue in the US, where many states have statutes banning same-sex unions.

Outside the courthouse a small number of protesters had gathered too - chanting slogans and holding up banners reading: "America's doomed."

"This is the last generation. This nation's destruction is imminent and they did it to themselves," said anti-gay activist Shirley Phelps-Roper, who travelled to Washington from Kansas to protest against the decision.

Story from BBC NEWS:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/america/8548760.stm>

Published: 2010/03/04 00:26:09 GMT

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