

STATEMENT OF GOVERNOR ROMNEY ON GAY MARRIAGE DEBATE - MARCH 29, 2004

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Department

MARCH 29, 2004

Good evening.

Earlier today, the State Legislature met in a rare joint session and passed an amendment to the Massachusetts Constitution that defines marriage as the union of a man and a woman.

For this amendment to become part of our Constitution, it must be passed by the Legislature again and then be approved by the people of Massachusetts in November 2006.

The process of amending the Constitution is a serious matter. It should only occur on those few occasions when it is necessary to resolve fundamental questions affecting all of the people.

This is one of those times.

The reason the Legislature has taken this step is because the Supreme Judicial Court in a recent case issued a decision permitting persons of the same sex to marry. The Legislature has now passed an amendment in opposition to the Court's decision, creating a conflict between the two branches.

Given this conflict, I believe the Supreme Judicial Court should delay the imposition of its decision until the people have a chance to be heard.

There is another, more compelling reason to delay the Court's decision.

If we begin providing for same-sex marriages on May 17, as ordered by the Court, and then our citizens choose to limit marriage to a man and woman by their vote in November 2006, we will have created a good deal of confusion during the period in between - for the couples involved, for our state, for other states where couples may have moved and for the children of these families.

For these reasons, I will seek a stay of the Court's decision until the constitutional amendment process has run its course. My formal request for a stay will be delivered tomorrow to Attorney General Tom Reilly, who acts as the Commonwealth's attorney in these matters.

It's important to note that in defending traditional marriage the Legislature is not attacking nontraditional relationships.

People of differing views and lifestyles deserve respect and decency from all of us. There are real people and real lives that are deeply affected by this issue: traditional couples, gay couples and children. But, even as we disagree, let us not forget that what we are talking about is a basic social institution of our state and nation.

At the core of American democracy is the principle that the most fundamental decisions in society should ultimately be decided by the people themselves.

I believe the Supreme Judicial Court has an obligation, to the Constitution and to the people of Massachusetts, to withhold their decision until the people can consider this issue themselves.

Thank you.

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