

Lawfully Wed || Gay Marriage

'It's over': Couples in lawsuit elated

Challengers of Arizona's statute express joy, relief

SHAUN MCKINNON
THE REPUBLIC • AZCENTRAL.COM

Clark Rowley had already settled behind his desk at work Friday morning when an e-mail arrived from a familiar Phoenix law office.

Rowley called David Chaney. "It's over," he said. "The ban is over."

Chaney jumped into his car, met Rowley at his office and the two made a beeline for the Maricopa County Clerk of the Superior Court's Office. Inside of an hour, they clutched an official marriage license, one of the first issued in Arizona after a federal judge overturned the state's ban on same-sex unions.

"It has been a long road," Chaney said. "It's hard to believe we made it. When I think about it just for David and myself and then realize what we've been involved with ... We're helping make a change in everyone's lives who wanted this to happen."

Rowley and Chaney were one of seven couples who signed on to a lawsuit earlier this year seeking to end Arizona's marriage restrictions.

They joined co-plaintiffs from their own case and couples from a second challenge outside the clerk's office on Friday to celebrate their legal victory.

Nelda Majors and Karen Bailey, lead plaintiffs in the second case, were the



Clark Rowley (left) and David Chaney proudly show off their marriage license on Friday at a press conference. "It has been a long road," Chaney said.

first in line to take out a license in downtown Phoenix. The women have been together nearly 57 years and finally were able to make their relationship legal. "We feel great," Majors, 76, said outside the courthouse. "It's a wonderful feeling."

"Never 57 years ago would we have thought this day would come, but now it's here, and we are just so glad," said Bai-

ley, 75.

They wore matching red blazers and walked out of the clerk's office to a crowd of journalists and photographers, holding the marriage license in their hand. The first thing they did after speaking with reporters was act as legal witnesses to the first marriage held outside the clerk's office.

David Larance, 36, and Kevin Patterson, 31, were co-plaintiffs with Majors and Bailey in the lawsuit filed by Lambda Legal, a national gay-advocacy group. They raced to the courthouse Friday with their adopted daughters.

"For many couples, I think it's just one step closer to feeling safer and feeling recognized and to be able to take care of the family they've created in their hearts," Patterson said.

Phoenix attorney Shawn Aiken filed the first lawsuit in January after friends approached him about challenging Arizona's laws. Aiken had little experience in civil-rights cases, but he agreed to take the case. He was elated Friday.

"One of the clients called me in tears about their wedding ceremony this afternoon," he said. "Satisfying doesn't begin to say how I felt. I'm so grateful to be a part of a decision that will give thousands of couples that moment, that will cause that kind of joy between people who love one another. It's tremendous."

Early Friday afternoon, Rowley and Chaney gathered with a few friends in front of the LOVE sculpture in downtown Scottsdale, not far from the plaza where they had traded vows in 2010, vows that at the time carried no legal weight.

With two of their attorneys acting as witnesses, Rowley and Chaney once more said, "I do." And this time, they had the paperwork to prove it.

Republic reporter Ryan Van Velzer and 12 News contributed to this article.

Arizona clergy members divided over change in law

MICHAEL CLANCY
THE REPUBLIC • AZCENTRAL.COM

Dozens of clergy members began marrying gay couples across Arizona on Friday shortly after Attorney General Tom Horne announced he would not appeal a U.S. appellate court decision legalizing the unions.

The pastors, largely from the United Church of Christ and the Unitarian Universalist Association, stood outside marriage-license offices in Phoenix, Tucson, Kingman, Yuma, Flagstaff and Prescott as couples arrived to receive licenses.

The Rev. John Dorhauer officiated Friday as a gay couple in Phoenix became one of the state's first to exchange legal vows.

"This was maybe my most important moment in 26 years of ministry," said Dorhauer, leader of the United Church of Christ in Arizona. "The joy I felt after decades of advocacy was unutterable. I was fighting back tears of pride and joy."

By 2 p.m., less than four hours after Horne's announcement, at least 40 weddings had taken place at Arizona courthouses, said Debra Peevey, faith director of Why Marriage Matters Arizona, which organized the clergy members along with No Longer Silent Clergy for Justice.

Peevey, a minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), said the group of pastors has plans to marry numerous other couples at churches and other locations. A final tally of how many services the group performed Friday was not available.

The pastors were on site Friday morning shortly after U.S. District Judge John Sedwick threw out Arizona's ban on gay marriage. Horne followed the ruling with a decision not to appeal and to permit county clerks to begin issuing marriage licenses immediately.

"When history is being made, people of faith want to be there in support (of anyone seeking a license)," Peevey said, adding that some pastors were prepared to officiate at weddings immediately while others were there to back the couples in case protesters objected.

"I never, never thought this would happen in Arizona," said the Rev. Eric Ledermann, a pastor at University Presbyterian Church in Tempe. He went to the Maricopa County San Tan Justice Court in Chandler to marry any same-sex couples who showed up Friday.

Not all religious officials applauded Sedwick's decision, however.

Leaders of the Roman Catholic Church said in a statement that the action "overturns the will of Arizona voters and reflects a misunderstanding of the institution of marriage."

The statement was released Friday morning by the church's lobbying arm, the Arizona Catholic Conference.

It continued: "For centuries, marriage has been recognized as the lifelong union of a man and a woman that benefits the common good by respecting the unique and complementary gifts of both a mother and a father in the lives of children. As Catholic bishops, we remain committed to affirming the truth about marriage and its goodness for all of society."

"It is our fervent hope that the Supreme Court will eventually reconsider the issue of marriage in the future. In the meantime, we pray that the Church may continue to serve as a loving and joyful witness of the truth about the family and human sexuality."

The bishops also said they "reiterate our pastoral concern for all people, including our brothers and sisters with same-sex attraction, and denounce any unjust discrimination toward everyone."

The Rev. Bob Hake,

"This was maybe my most important moment in 26 years of ministry."

THE REV. JOHN DORHAUER
LEADER OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN ARIZONA

lead pastor at Orange-wood Church of the Nazarene, said he was angry that judges overturned the voter-approved measures banning gay marriage.

"I am disappointed, frustrated and concerned. We take the biblical position on the family, and we run into a great amount of difficulty when we try to change God's

plan."

He said he welcomes gay people at his church, "but we do not have the right to redefine marriage."

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints issued a statement when the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear challenges to judges' rulings overturning gay-marriage bans.

It said, "The succession of federal court decisions in recent months, culminating in today's announcement by the Supreme Court, will have no effect on the doctrinal position or practices of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

Republic reporter Dianna M. Nández contributed to this article.

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