

# The Washington Post

## Maryland same-sex marriage bill: House holdout Alston ready to vote, won't tip hand

By John Wagner  
Washington Post Staff Writer  
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Legislation that would legalize same-sex marriages in Maryland remained in limbo Wednesday as leaders of the House of Delegates [continued to delay](#) a committee vote on the high-profile measure.

The House Judiciary Committee could try again as early as Thursday to hold a vote on the bill, which was thrown off-track Tuesday after two delegates who had pledged their support [skipped a scheduled vote](#).

Dels. [Tiffany T. Alston \(D-Prince George's\)](#) and [Jill Carter \(D-Baltimore\)](#) both told reporters Wednesday that they are now prepared to vote, but Alston would not say whether she still supports the legislation.

Bill supporters have been counting on the votes of Alston and Carter - both of whom are listed as co-sponsors - to reach the 12-vote majority needed to send the bill to the floor with a favorable recommendation.

The bill [passed the Senate 25 to 21 last week](#), and House leaders had been angling to send the bill to Gov. Martin O'Malley (D) by the end of this week.

Shortly before 2 a.m. Wednesday, [Alston issued a statement](#) in which she said she had needed "a little more time to weigh my final decision" on Tuesday.

In an interview Wednesday, Alston said she had reached a decision but was not ready to disclose it.

"I think people make the best decisions they can with the options that are available to them," Alston said. "I don't think anyone should hold any of our decisions against us, because this is a very difficult decision."

In her statement, Alston said she was listening to conflicting views of her constituents and said her duty as a delegate is "compounded when your personal religious beliefs are contrary to what you believe to be fundamentally right for society."

Carter, the other of the two holdouts Tuesday, told WBAL-TV on Wednesday that her concerns have been addressed.

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"I'm content and ready to vote for the bill," Carter said.

By withholding her vote, Carter said, she hoped to get increased funding for Baltimore schools and to focus more attention on a child custody bill she is sponsoring.

That legislation could get a committee vote Thursday along with the same-sex marriage bill.

Legislative leaders said they have been working for weeks to boost funding for Baltimore and Prince George's schools, which would receive less state money next year than this year under an existing funding formula.

[Don H. Dwyer Jr. \(R-Anne Arundel\)](#), a staunch opponent of the same-sex marriage bill, said the continuing delays are "a good thing when you look at it from my perspective."

"That means the votes aren't there," Dwyer said.

[House Speaker Michael E. Busch \(D-Anne Arundel\)](#), who supports the measure, said in a brief interview Wednesday that he was hopeful that the issues would be resolved and that "we can go forward with a vote."

If the bill becomes law, Maryland would join five other states and the District in legalizing same-sex marriage.

The legislature might not get the final say on the matter. The Maryland Constitution allows residents to petition just-passed laws to the ballot if enough signatures are collected.

Supporters and opponents expect a petition drive to be successful if the bill passes.

That would put the bill on hold until November 2012, pending the result of a statewide referendum.

*Staff writer Sandhya Somashekhar contributed to this report.*

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