

WeeklyStandard.comPublished on *The Weekly Standard* (<http://www.weeklystandard.com>)

Same-Sex Marriage Bill Stalls in Deep-Blue Maryland

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March 3, 2011 5:51 PM

In November, [Maryland defied the national trend](#) and elected a Democratic governor and a Democratic legislature. A bill legalizing same-sex marriage was expected to sail through the legislature and be signed into law. Indeed, earlier this week, the [state Senate passed the gay marriage bill 25 to 21](#). But the bill has hit a snag in the [Maryland House of Delegates](#) and is now at risk of dying.

Things really seemed to go wrong on Tuesday, when two Democratic delegates failed to show up for a vote on the bill in the House Judicial Committee. Jill Carter, one of those missing delegates, says she "didn't block the vote" and still supports the gay marriage bill. She says she didn't show up because "[we didn't have the votes](#)."

Tiffany Alston, the other missing delegate, says [she now wants a civil unions bill](#). By most counts, Alston's vote is needed for the same-sex marriage bill to pass. And the committee chairman doesn't know if he has the votes:

"I don't know whether the votes are there or not, we'll wait and see," [Chairman Joseph] Vallario says.

Delegate Don Dwyer, R-Anne Arundel, believes the longer it takes to take a vote on the measure, the more support the bill loses.

"Every day that this thing delays, more and more news goes out about it and the pressure continues to mount," Dwyer says.

The charge against gay marriage in Maryland is being led largely by [African-American pastors](#)--"some of the most vocal opponents" of the measure, the *Washington Post* reports. The campaign seems to be working. Alston represents a heavily African American district in Prince George's County, and she "told reporters that her [constituents have bombarded her with negative reaction to the proposal which has passed the state Senate](#)," reports a local Fox affiliate.

Maryland isn't the only blue state where gay marriage legislation may be floundering. In Rhode Island, Governor Lincoln Chafee, a progressive Republican turned progressive independent, and openly gay Democratic House speaker Gordon Fox don't seem to have the votes. [Maggie Gallagher](#) of the National Organization for Marriage writes:

Getting a gay marriage bill through the Rhode Island House of Representatives with Gov. Lincoln Chafee's support and a new openly gay House speaker was supposed to be a cakewalk. Instead, as The Boston Phoenix (an alternative paper) reports: "The end game is proving trickier than advocates had hoped. ... They've been caught off guard by the prowess of the church, which has joined with the nation's leading anti-gay marriage group to mount a surprisingly potent defense of the status quo." (By "anti-gay group" they mean the National Organization for Marriage, which I chair). Speaker Gordon Fox suddenly pulled the bill, and its future is now uncertain.

The events in Maryland and Rhode Island seem to contradict all of the claims that social issues just don't matter like they used to. Polls show that younger voters support gay marriage more than older voters, but that demographic shift has not yet produced many victories for gay marriage in even some of the bluest states. Gay marriage has been defeated legislatively in [New York](#) in 2009 and in [New Jersey](#) in 2010. Through referenda, [voters repealed Maine's law](#) in 2009 and invalidated the [California](#) state supreme court's ruling in 2008.

In Iowa, the third state (after Massachusetts and Connecticut) to have same-sex marriage imposed by court order, [three Supreme Court judges were sacked](#) in November because of their ruling. The only states that got gay marriage laws on the books though the legislative process are [Vermont](#) (2009) and [New Hampshire](#) (2010). (And New Hampshire now has a veto-proof majority of Republicans and will vote on repeal of gay marriage in [January 2012](#), but it's not clear that the whole GOP caucus will vote for repeal.) We'll know soon enough if Rhode Island or Maryland join them or continue the trend of blue states against gay marriage.

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