



House Judiciary Committee Postpones Vote on Same-Sex Marriage - Southern Maryland Headline News

Originally posted on: March 01, 2011

By *MAGGIE CLARK*

*Chairman Joseph Vallario is only Southern Maryland
Delegate on Committee*

ANNAPOLIS (March 1, 2011) ♦ The [House of Delegates Judiciary Committee](#) on Tuesday postponed a vote on a bill allowing same-sex marriage after a day of political posturing that included absent delegates, shifting vote counts and long meetings among legislative leaders.

The bill causing so much contention was the Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Protection Act ([2011 House Bill 175](#)), which changes the definition of marriage from "between a man and a woman" to "between two individuals" and permits churches to refuse to perform same-sex unions if the practice violates their beliefs.

The committee attempted to hold an unscheduled vote after Tuesday morning's general session, but three co-sponsors, Delegates Tiffany Alston, D-Prince George's, Jill Carter, D-Baltimore, and Curtis Anderson, D-Baltimore, were absent. Chairman Joseph Vallario (D-Calvert, P.G.) rescheduled the vote until after the committee's afternoon schedule.

Around 6 p.m., after five hours of testimony on unrelated bills, and long stretches of time where he was not in the hearing room, Vallario again postponed the vote, arguing that not all delegates were present and that it was too late to call the vote.

"The hour is late, there are delegates missing on this side and that side ... we might vote tomorrow, but I don't know," Vallario said.

Tuesday morning's absences came as a surprise to the bill's sponsors and speaks to the internal struggle going on among delegates who are wavering over their stance on same-sex marriage, said Delegate Bonnie Cullison, D-Montgomery.

Up until the end of last week, passage of the bill in the House seemed likely, but as of Tuesday, several delegates were still on the fence.

"Since the Senate has passed the same-sex marriage bill, many delegates are struggling with their votes, now that they have to push a button," Cullison said.

Opponents saw tonight's vote postponement as undemocratic.

"It's supposed to be around here that you're allowed to vote your conscience on these social issues, like abortion, and like gay marriage. Apparently the Democratic leadership is not going to allow certain members to vote their conscience and they're going to force them to vote the way they want. They're going to twist arms until they get the result they want," said Delegate Michael Smigiel, R-Upper Shore.

Delegate Jill Carter, D-Baltimore, who was absent from both of Tuesday's scheduled votes, said she didn't want the leadership to take her vote "for granted".

"My experience here is that things get concluded very early when there's a will to do so. I think it's clear that the bill was rushed through the Senate. And then we had hearings (on the bill) until 10 o'clock Friday night and then we were expected to vote yesterday. So I think there's clearly a will to push this through and to get a resolution," said Carter.

"I don't feel good about disappointing my colleagues, but I think that has to be secondary to my obligation to do as much as I can (for my constituents)," said Carter, who argued that funding for schools and other issues should get as much priority as same-sex marriage.

Delegate Don Dwyer, R-Anne Arundel, an opponent of same-sex marriage, said he was surprised by Tuesday's wrangling.

"I'm actually shocked that today has gone like it has, but I

have to say, I'm very happy that the process is stalled. What I gathered today was the additional six hours of public pressure put on members and that's having an effect," Dwyer said.

He said he has directed thousands of opponents of the bill to call their delegates to vote no on the bill.

"There are literally thousands and thousands of calls and emails going out right now across the state ... this is a major issue. This is more important than slots to the voters. This is a major, major shift in public policy and a cultural issue," Dwyer said.

Groups opposed to same-sex marriage were also encouraged by Tuesday's stalled committee vote.

Derek McCoy, director of the Association of Maryland Families, said that in both Alston and Carter's district, the majority of constituents do not support the bill.

"My group and a broader group of clergy are on the phone to the legislators and we're making calls to their districts. Let the people tell them they don't want this to go down. We're not brokering deals, we're not doing the backroom deals ... we're just being pure and letting them know we don't want it to go down," McCoy said.

The committee of 22 delegates requires 12 votes for passage of a bill. The committee will meet again Wednesday afternoon where a vote on the same-sex marriage bill could be taken.