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## MARRIAGES

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the intervention would slow the case's progress to higher courts. The parties involved in the suit all agreed to an "accelerated timeline" to expedite the case, which will likely decide the constitutionality of Oregon's existing marriage statutes, according to Kevin Neely, spokesman for Oregon Attorney General Hardy Myers. A speedy resolution to the case is necessary to bring consistency to counties across the state, Neely said.

"Our position is that we need to resolve this matter as quickly as possible," he said.

On Wednesday, the American Civil Liberties Union filed the suit, which consolidates several prior suits for and against same-sex marriage on behalf of nine gay couples. Five of the couples were married with county licenses, but were denied legal recognition and marriage licenses by the state, ACLU of Oregon Executive Director David Fidanque said. The other couples have been denied marriage licenses by their respective counties.

Fidanque said that the ACLU will

be arguing on behalf of the nine couples that the state's refusal to issue licenses to all couples violates Article 1, Section 20 of the Oregon Constitution. Basic Rights Oregon, a gay-rights advocacy group that worked with the ACLU to persuade the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners to begin issuing same-sex marriage licenses, is also involved in the case.

The Defense of Marriage Coalition and Multnomah County officials will also intervene in the suit to bring all the relevant parties into the case. The Coalition agreed to drop two prior suits designed to halt same-sex marriage to help expedite the case.

Oral arguments will begin April 19, pending any delays. Judge Bearden's decision will be appealed by the losing party and will go to the Oregon Court of Appeals, which will decide whether it wants to hear the case or send it directly to the Oregon Supreme Court, Fidanque said.

Among the plaintiffs are University law Professor Dominick Vetri and his longtime partner, Doug DeWitt. Vetri resides in Linn County, which has not granted same-sex marriage licenses. He said the case is both personally significant and a milestone

for gay rights.

"Marriage is the last major barrier to equal respect and concern under American law for gays and lesbians," Vetri said.

While the case makes its way through the court system, the majority of counties continue to abide by the attorney general's interpretation of Oregon marriage statutes.

Neely said the attorney general advised all counties to follow past practices by only issuing marriage licenses to male-female couples until a Supreme Court ruling.

Fidanque said he approved of Benton County's decision to stop issuing marriage licenses to all couples as a temporary measure, adding that couples eager to marry can receive a marriage license from a neighboring county and perform the wedding ceremony in Benton County.

"Either you issue licenses to all couples, gay and straight, or you don't issue marriage licenses to anybody — that's the only way you can treat all couples equally and avoid violating the Oregon Constitution," Fidanque said.

Benton County commissioners could not be reached for comment.

Lane County spokeswoman Melinda Kletzok said the Lane County Board of Commissioners has not officially discussed issuing same-sex marriage licenses and is waiting for a Supreme Court decision.

But Basic Rights Oregon spokeswoman Rebekah Kassell said she is "not satisfied" with Lane County's decision not to grant same-sex marriage licenses.

"It's disappointing that they would not protect the constitutional rights of many citizens who want to get married there," Kassell said.

Contact the city/  
state politics reporter  
at [parkerhowell@dailyemerald.com](mailto:parkerhowell@dailyemerald.com).

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