

The bill now moves to both chambers for floor votes. Although the bill appears to have a solid chance of passing, Republican Gov. M. Jodi Rell has threatened a veto.

According to state Rep. Michael Lawlor, D-East Haven, co-chairman of the committee, it is difficult to speculate how the governor will vote, with opinions on same-sex marriage evolving rapidly.



Amy Sorrell, a journalism teacher from Indiana, might be fired for a student editorial about intolerance toward gays.

INDIANA

Hearing Set for Journalism Teacher

Woodlan Junior-Senior High School journalism teacher Amy Sorrell's future will be discussed at an April 28 hearing she requested.

The educator was placed on paid leave by the district last month after a student's opinion piece ran in the school newspaper, questioning those who are intolerant of gays. She was informed that the board would consider terminating her contract at its May 1 meeting for alleged insubordination, neglect of duty, substantial inability to perform teaching duties and other reasons.

The hearing, Sorrell said, would allow her supporters a chance to speak. When they tried to address the school board at a meeting in March, they were silenced by board president Stephen Terry, because he said the board may have to determine whether to fire Sorrell as a district employee.

Jack Groch, the Indiana State Teachers Association representative for East Allen County Schools, asked for more details regarding the allegations and had yet to receive them April 10.

The school's attorney, Tim McCaulay, said that during the hearing, he will present the administration's evidence and arguments for terminating Sorrell. The board has also secured separate legal council.

The board does not expect a decision to be made at the April 28 hearing but will likely schedule a closed session before the May 1 meeting to discuss the matter.

Marriage Ban Dies in Committee

An Indiana House committee voted down a proposed same-sex marriage ban April 3, to the glee of gay rights supporters and large companies that opposed the ban. Strategists suggest the move likely killed the initiative in the 2007 legislative session.

"This truly is significant," said John Joannette, a lobbyist for Indiana Equality. "This was all about doing what's right for the state of Indiana and the people of Indiana."

The House Rules and Legislative Procedures Committee voted the measure down in a 5-5 vote. A majority was needed to pass out of committee.

Though some of the ban's opponents, such as state Rep. Terri J. Austin, D-Anderson, agree that marriage should remain between one man and one woman, they say the bill's phrasing might weaken chances for domestic partnership legislation to pass in the future.

State Sen. Brandt Hershman, R-Wheatfield, the measure's author, voiced disappointed with

the decision, acknowledging the measure's defeat. A House vote was the last hurdle it needed to clear before being placed on the 2008 ballot.

However, the General Assembly still could pass the amendment next year, and voters could still vote in 2008.

MARYLAND

Gay Rights Bills Prove Victorious

The Maryland House of Delegates passed legislation requiring health insurance companies to write policies inclusive of domestic partners and children up to the age of 25, at the request of an employer.

The 122-18 vote took place April 10. The bill has already passed in the Senate and now moves to Democratic Gov. Martin O'Malley's desk for signing.

The legislation was proposed by Equality Maryland after hearing reports from same-sex couples that their employers were amenable to offering domestic partner benefits but that they were unable to purchase such a policy from their insurance companies.

This was one of several bills benefiting the sexual minorities community this session. Legislation also passed that authorized insurers issuing policies of group life insurance to extend coverage to domestic partners of the member who is covered.

A third bill passed allowing gays and lesbians to sue for compensatory damages in discrimination cases. Previously, Maryland law only allowed litigants to bring claims of employment discrimination to federal courts, denying access to state courts for gay Marylanders who are not protected from discrimination under federal law.

An attempt to ban same-sex marriage in the state was defeated in committee. Same-sex couples are awaiting a ruling on same-sex marriage from the state's highest court.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Civil Unions Inch Toward Reality

A crowd of approximately 400 people attended a Senate hearing April 10 in Concord, N.H., that lasted for five hours.

The hearing focused on House Bill 437, a civil union bill that passed by a 243-129 vote in the House.

Sponsored by state Reps. Jim Splaine, D-Portsmouth, and Dana Hilliard, D-Somersworth, the bill would allow same-sex couples to form legally binding partnerships with all of the rights and responsibilities of marriage. If the bill passes, New Hampshire would be the first state to offer gay unions without court intervention. 10

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