



Press Release

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Coming Soon to Big Sky Country: Marriage Equality

Ninth Circuit decision paves the way for Montana District Court ruling by the end of the year

HELENA, MT — A Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling today that marriage bans in Nevada and Idaho are unconstitutional means Montana will soon be a marriage equality state.

"I'm finally going to be able to marry the woman I love," says Angie Rolando of her partner Tonya. The Great Falls couple is one of four plaintiff couples represented by the ACLU of Montana in a federal court case challenging Montana's marriage amendment. "We've been dreaming of this day for so long, and now we can start planning our wedding. Here come the brides!"

"This is a great day for marriage equality," says Elizabeth Gill, staff attorney with the ACLU Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Project. "The ruling that the bans on same-sex couples marrying in Idaho and Nevada are unconstitutional is important for not only the states whose marriage bans were involved – Idaho and Nevada – but also for every state in the Ninth Circuit that still excludes same-sex couples from the freedom to marry, including Montana. Coupled with the Supreme Court yesterday denying certiorari on similar rulings, the effect of today's Ninth Circuit opinion will be to add five more states to the growing number of marriage equality states. It means that marriage equality will soon be the law of the land in 35 states."

The Ninth Circuit Court ruled in a unanimous opinion that Idaho and Nevada's bans on marriage for same-sex couples are unconstitutional as discrimination based on sexual orientation under the federal Equal Protection Clause.

In addition to Angie and Tonya Rolando of Great Falls, the couples in the ACLU's lawsuit challenging Montana's marriage amendment are Shauna and Nicole Goubeaux of Billings, Ben Milano and Chase Weinhandl of Bozeman and Sue Hawthorne and Adel Johnson of Helena.

All that stands in the way of marriage equality in Montana is a final ruling in our case. "We will be filing for summary judgment right away," says ACLU of Montana Legal Director Jim Taylor. "Then it's just up to Judge Brian Morris to apply the Ninth Circuit's opinion. Then we expect to hear champagne corks popping across the state."

In addition to Taylor and Gill, the couples are represented by Ben Alke and James Goetz of Goetz, Gallik & Baldwin P.C.; and Stuart Plunkett, Ruth Borenstein, Ariel Ruiz, and Emily Regier of the law firm Morrison & Foerster LLP.

Additional information about the case and plaintiffs can be found at www.aclumontana.org