



Press Release

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Marriage Equality: Good for Montana, Good for Business

Study finds extending marriage to same-sex couples could add \$4.5 million to state economy

BILLINGS, MT — Extending marriage to Montana's same-sex couples would create \$4.5 million in new spending in the state over the first three years as about 675 couples tie the knot, according to a recently released study.

The Williams Institute study on the economic impact of marriage equality in Montana found that in the first year alone, total spending on wedding arrangements and tourism by same-sex couples and their guests in Montana would add \$2.9 million the local economy. Over three years it would create 20-60 jobs.

"The study confirms that all Montanans would benefit from marriage for same-sex couples, not just the LGBT community," said Williams Distinguished Scholar M.V. Lee Badgett, who authored the study with Williams Gleason Kettel Summer Fellow Justin M. O'Neill and Williams Senior Counsel Christy Mallory.

The Williams Institute is a UCLA Law national think tank dedicated to conducting rigorous, independent research on sexual orientation and gender identity law and public policy.

Chris Montague is the third generation in his family to own and operate the longtime Billings business, Montague's Jewelers, one of the city's top places to buy wedding and engagement rings.

"I've sold rings to many same-sex couples who want to express their love and devotion through a wedding or commitment ceremony," Montague says. "It's not only the right thing to do, but it's the only business decision that makes sense. This segment of the wedding business is going to grow over the coming years, and I am happy to serve our entire community."

Florist Julio Freitas is co-owner of Kirkham & Co in Bozeman, where he specializes in custom floral arrangements for weddings. "Montana is such a beautiful place. It's perfect for destination weddings. When we become a marriage equality state, we'll attract even more weddings and the business they bring to Montana," Freitas said. "Right now loving same-sex couples denied the right to marry here are going elsewhere for their weddings. They should be able to marry at home. We're ready to help them celebrate."

The ACLU of Montana is representing four couples in a federal court case challenging Montana's marriage amendment. The Ninth Circuit Court, the appeals court over Montana, ruled last week 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. All that stands in the way of marriage equality in Montana is a final ruling in our case.

Additional information about the Williams Institute study and the ACLU of Montana case and plaintiffs can be found at www.aclumontana.org