

Dec-21-06 Governor Corzine Signs Civil Union Bill

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GOVERNOR CORZINE SIGNS CIVIL UNION BILL

TRENTON – Governor Jon S. Corzine today signed legislation giving same-sex couples the right to enter into civil unions, ensuring them equal treatment under the law and providing them the same protections, benefits and responsibilities as individuals in a marriage.

“We must recognize that many gay and lesbian couples in New Jersey are in committed relationships and deserve the same benefits and rights as every other family in this state,” Governor Corzine said. “I believe very fundamentally in equal protection under the law and this legislation is about meeting that basic responsibility and honoring the commitments that individuals have made to each other.”

The legislation, passed in response to the New Jersey Supreme Court’s Lewis vs. Harris ruling in October of this year, also creates the New Jersey Civil Union Review Commission to evaluate the implementation of the law and report back to the Governor and the Legislature.

The bill gives individuals in civil unions all of the rights granted to married couples, including the rights of hospital visitation, the ability to collect survivor benefits, and eligibility for tax deductions. Businesses, public and private employers, organizations and institutions will be required to treat civil union couples in the same manner as married persons are treated.

Licenses for civil unions will be issued with the same requirements and restrictions which apply to marriage licenses, and those officials currently empowered to perform marriages will be able to conduct civil unions as well.

“The new year will undoubtedly be remembered as one in which same sex couples took a huge step in the march towards equality. I’m grateful to

Governor Corzine and my colleagues in the Legislature for their support of this monumental legislation," said Senate President Richard J. Codey (D-Essex), one of the Senate sponsors of the legislation.

"Same-sex couples have cause to celebrate today as they move forward on their long and difficult journey to equality," said Senator Loretta Weinberg (D-Bergen) who also sponsored the legislation in the Senate.

"The civil union law reaffirms New Jersey's standing as a national leader in the area of providing equal rights for its citizens," said Assembly Speaker Joseph J. Roberts, Jr. (D-Camden), who sponsored the legislation in the Assembly. "It establishes a progressive legal mechanism for same-sex couples that clearly enjoys the widest support among the state's residents."

"Finally, same-sex couples who have made a commitment to spend their lives together will be able to bask in the same rights, privileges, and benefits that married couples have enjoyed for generations," said Assemblyman Wilfredo Caraballo (D-Essex), another Assembly sponsor. "Today, we proclaim the dignity of all relationships and reaffirm that all couples – straight and gay – deserve equal protection under the law."

The bill was also sponsored in the Assembly by Bonnie Watson Coleman, John. F. McKeon, John J. Burzichelli, Mims Hackett, Valerie Vainieri Huttle and Douglas H. Fisher.