



December 07, 2007

Rhode Island Supreme Court Blocks Couple's Divorce

The Rhode Island Supreme Court has blocked Cassandra Ormiston and Margaret Chambers from obtaining a divorce in Rhode Island.

The women are Rhode Island residents who married in Fall River, Massachusetts in 2004, and sought a divorce in Rhode Island Family Court in October, 2006. Family Court Chief Judge Jeremiah S. Jeremiah Jr. asked the Supreme Court to rule on whether his court could recognize the couple's Massachusetts marriage for the purpose of granting them the divorce. The Court's answer in today's ruling was no.

We are dismayed that the Court has gone out of its way to make an apparent gay exception to the rule and tradition of respect for valid out-of-state marriages, and has opted to place obstacles before this couple that other Rhode Island couples do not face. As stated in the dissenting opinion in today's decision, this ruling "places the parties, and all those similarly situated, in an untenable position. They are denied access to the Family Court and thus are left in a virtual legal limbo."

While it is clear that this decision is limited to an interpretation of the Rhode Island divorce jurisdiction statute and should not be read more broadly to disrespect the valid marriages of same-sex couples, we must now call on the Rhode Island legislature to move marriage equality forward, and to protect the state's citizens from having to deal with absurd and unfair burdens such as have been placed before this couple.

We will continue working with our partners in Rhode Island to ensure that equality prevails.

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