

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Same-Sex Marriage Now Legal In U.S. Virgin Islands As U.S. Supreme Court Hands Down Historic Ruling

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In what is sure to be remembered as a long-sought victory for the gay rights movement, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on Friday that the Constitution guarantees a nationwide -- and by extension a territorial right -- to same-sex marriage.

The majority opinion was written by Justice Anthony M. Kennedy in the 5-4 decision and was joined by Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Elena Kagan, Stephen Breyer and Sonia Sotomayor.

The high court's ruling changes the dynamics of family life not only in the U.S., but also its Virgin Islands, the latter of which still remains conservative on the issue of same-

sex marriage.

Friday's victory is also a culmination of a decades-long debate, along with litigation in the U.S., and recently in Guam, and it comes against the backdrop of an accelerating change of mindset in favor of the lifestyle.

The Obama administration, one of gay movement's strongest supporters, had urged the justices to rule in favor of same-sex couples.

"Gay and lesbian people are equal," said Solicitor General Donald B. Verrilli Jr. via the New York Times. "They deserve equal protection of the laws, and they deserve it now."

The justices found that under the 14th Amendment, states must issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples and recognize same-sex unions that were legally performed in other states.

The lead plaintiff in Obergefell v. Hodges is Ohio resident Jim Obergefell, who wanted to be listed as the surviving spouse on his husband's death certificate. In 2013, Obergefell married his partner of two decades, John Arthur, who suffered from ALS. Arthur passed away in October of that year, three months after the couple filed their lawsuit.

Obergefell was joined by several dozen other gay plaintiffs from Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio and Tennessee who were fighting both to be able to marry and to have their marriage recognized in every state in the country.

Recently, Guam became the [first of the U.S. territories to legalize same-sex marriage](#), an occurrence that was unlikely in the Virgin Islands, which is dominated by a culture with deep-rooted religious beliefs.

In 2014, former Sen. Judi Buckley had drafted a same-sex marriage measure, but the bill never made it to the Senate floor after outrage erupted territory-wide.

Now, with the Supreme Court's ruling, same-sex couples will be able to live and marry freely in the U.S. Virgin Islands, with all the benefits that heterosexual couples enjoy.