

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp To Issue Executive Order Mandating Gov. Agencies To Comply With Supreme Court's Same-Sex Ruling

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ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp has announced that he's currently working on an executive order to direct government agencies and departments to follow the U.S. Supreme Court's June 26 ruling in favor of same-sex marriage.

Mapp made the announcement during a Tuesday morning press conference at Government House, stating that upon taking office in January, he swore to uphold the laws of the land.

"The Government of the Virgin Islands as a civil society can no longer discriminate on marriage," Mapp said. "The nation has arrived, pursuant to the Supreme Court's ruling, at full marriage equality -- when two consenting adults appear for a marriage license and apply for that license, civil society is required to respond. And so persons of the same-sex can be married in the U.S. Virgin Islands."

The governor stressed that the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling does not force churches and ministers to perform same-sex or any other kind of marriage, however as the territory's leader, he must abide by the law.

"I want to again underscore for the conversation that the Supreme Court ruling does not mandate the churches or ministers to perform marriages of any kind. But civil society does have that responsibility and can no longer discriminate on two consenting adults wishing to be married," Mapp said.

The benefits to marriage, the rights and privileges to marriage, must be extended to that individual. Whether it's health insurance, whether it's beneficiary, whether it's filing tax returns. - Governor Kenneth Mapp.

When asked about the sentiment among many that the territory was not quite ready for the historic ruling, the governor said his personal opinion on the matter is irrelevant.

"Well, it's not my decision," the chief executive said. "When Lieutenant Governor [Osbert] Potter and I met during the campaign, we met with a council of ministers and they talked about our position [concerning] if a bill should arrive at our desk legalizing same-sex marriage.

"We said to the ministers then that we would not be sending any bill to the Legislature to do that; but we cautioned them that the movement in the nation clearly indicated that the judicial branch of government would ultimately decide this issue. And that as sworn leaders of a civil society, we took an oath that we say we take freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion -- meaning that we take the oath swearing to uphold the laws of the nation as they apply to the Virgin Islands and the laws of the Virgin Islands."

He continued: "The Supreme Court has made a decision that affects the entire nation. It is not for me to express what my personal feelings are. It is for me to do the business of governance and the business of governance, given the Supreme Court's ruling, says that if an individual in the Virgin Islands is married to a person of the same-sex in any state of the nation, that the Virgin Islands government must recognize that marriage as lawful.

"So the benefits to marriage, the rights and privileges to marriage, must be extended to that individual. Whether it's health insurance, whether it's beneficiary, whether it's filing tax returns, and the executive order that I am writing is to alert the agencies and to direct them how they are to perform given the ruling as issued by the United States Supreme Court."

On June 26, the U.S. Supreme Court [ruled 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.

Last 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.

Following the ruling, Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett issued a statement making known that she was in alignment with President Obama on same-sex marriage, stating that "as a lawyer who truly loves the law and in my personal growth as a Christian and also being a parent watching my own children and reflecting on our world today, I join President Obama in support of the Supreme Court's decision."

Ministers *The Consortium* [interviewed last Saturday](#) stood steadfast in their belief that marriage is between a man and a woman, and advised Christians not to abandon their faith in light of the ruling.