



Civil unions would be allowed in Illinois beginning next year for same-sex couples under legislation the House passed today. The 61-52 vote followed spirited debate on whether the action would be tantamount to legalizing gay marriage.

Sponsoring Rep. Greg Harris, D-Chicago, called on his colleagues to join the arc of history that has gradually eliminated discrimination on social issues ranging from allowing women the right to vote to knocking down numerous social and legal barriers standing in the way of giving rights to people of color.

"We have a chance today to make Illinois a more fair state, a more just state, and a state which treats all of its citizens equally under the law," Harris said. "We have a chance here, as leaders have had in previous generations, to correct injustice and to move us down the path toward liberty."

The measure now goes to the Senate, where a similar bill passed in committee today. Rick Garcia, political director of the gay rights organization Equality Illinois, hailed the bill's passage as historic.

"I think it was telling that as the bill was being discussed the governor came out onto the floor and got a standing ovation," Garcia said. "We've taken a huge step toward fairness. We are thrilled."

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