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Gay marriage: Paterson has moved; now it's time for the Senate

We commend Gov. David Paterson for directing state agencies to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states. Now it is time for the state Senate to move on legislation to legalize gay marriage. By doing so, the Senate would allow the state to treat all couples with fairness and equity, instead of the scattershot network of gay-marriage recognition we have now.

Paterson sent a memo to state commissioners earlier this month directing them to review their regulations to ensure couples that were married in other jurisdictions would be covered. The memo was sent in response to a favorable Feb. 1 appellate court ruling involving a Monroe County couple, originally denied health insurance by Monroe Community College after they were married in Canada.

However, the state continues to recognize gay marriage in a stealthy manner, something that needs to change. The state's health insurance and local retirement systems recognize same-sex marriage. Many employers, such as Cornell University, offer benefits to same-sex couples. Forward-thinking municipalities such as the city and town of Ithaca offer registries for same-sex couples.

Instead of this hodgepodge system of recognition, the state Senate should pass the gay-marriage legislation, which currently remains locked away in a committee. The Assembly has passed gay-marriage legislation, and Paterson has signaled he supports gay marriage. It seems inevitable that New York will join California and Massachusetts as states where gay marriages can be legally performed — the only question is when it will happen.

Republicans cling to a narrow majority in the Senate. If they lose that majority during the fall elections, gay marriage will, in all likelihood, be a reality here. The state's highest court has said it is a legislative issue. Now is the time to make it a reality and stop the discrimination against same-sex couples.