

JAMES OBERGEFELL

b. July 7, 1966

MARRIAGE EQUALITY HERO

James Obergefell is the plaintiff in the U.S. Supreme Court decision that legalized same-sex marriage.

“We have to stand up and say we’ve had enough.”

Jim Obergefell is the plaintiff in the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision that legalized same-sex marriage nationwide.

A Cincinnati resident, Obergefell married John Arthur in Maryland in 2013. Arthur was terminally ill with ALS (Lou Gehrig’s disease), and Obergefell filed a lawsuit to force their home state of Ohio to recognize him as the surviving spouse on Arthur’s death certificate. The couple alleged that the state’s governor, John Kasich, was discriminating against same-sex couples who were legally married out of state.

In 2015 the Supreme Court ruled in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that state bans on same-sex marriage were unconstitutional, thus requiring all 50 states and U.S. territories to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

“Today’s ruling from the Supreme Court affirms what millions across the country already know to be true in our hearts,” Obergefell said upon learning the verdict, “that our love is equal.” President Barack Obama called the decision a “victory for America.”

Obergefell is an unanticipated activist. Born and raised in Sandusky, Ohio, he is the youngest of five children in a Catholic family. He came out as gay in his mid 20s and met Arthur in 1992. They lived together for 22 years before Arthur succumbed in 2014.

When Arthur was diagnosed with ALS in 2011, Obergefell became his primary caregiver. The couple flew to Maryland to legally marry just before Arthur died. They had already filed a federal lawsuit to allow Obergefell to be named Arthur’s surviving spouse. When the court ruled in favor of Obergefell, Ohio appealed the ruling and won. Obergefell took his fight to the Supreme Court.

Obergefell has become a marriage equality hero, traveling nationally and internationally. With Pulitzer Prize winner Debbie Cenziper, he is the co-author of “Love Wins: The Lovers and Lawyers Who Fought the Landmark Case for Marriage Equality.”



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