



## **Most voters still favor same-sex marriage amendment, poll says**

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By **CHRISTINA NUCKOLS**, The Virginian-Pilot

RICHMOND - A majority of Virginia voters continue to favor a proposed state constitutional ban on same-sex marriage and civil unions, a new poll shows.

However, diminishing support in recent months suggests the measure will pass by a smaller margin than has been seen in other states with similar amendments.

Fifty-two percent of likely voters said they support the Virginia amendment, according to a survey of 625 registered voters conducted by Mason-Dixon Polling & Research Inc. of Washington.

Forty-two percent said they plan to vote against the measure. The poll was taken Oct. 17 -19, three weeks before Election Day.

The 10-percentage-point spread is nearly half that seen in a July poll by Mason-Dixon, in which 56 percent favored the amendment and 38 percent opposed it.

Most of the 20 states that have constitutional bans on same-sex marriage saw the measures pass with support exceeding 70 percent.

The most recent ballot initiatives passed last year in Kansas and Texas, where support reached 70 percent and 76 percent, respectively.

**The narrowest passage came in 2004 in Oregon, where an amendment passed 57 percent to 43 percent, according to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and The Marriage Amendment Project.**

Northern Virginia is the only region of the commonwealth where opponents outnumber supporters, according to the Mason-Dixon poll. Sixty percent of respondents living in the suburbs of Washington said they will vote "no" on the ballot initiative.

"One of the reasons it's narrower in Virginia than some other states is because of the great cultural divide in Northern Virginia compared to the rest of the state," said J. Bradford Coker, managing director of Mason-Dixon. "Once you take Northern Virginia out of the mix, Virginia looks a lot like the rest of the country."

In Hampton Roads, 58 percent of those polled said they support the amendment, with 35 percent opposed.

The margin of error for the statewide poll numbers is no more than plus or minus 4 percentage points. The margin of error for regional breakdowns is higher.

State leaders remain divided over the amendment. Gov. Timothy M. Kaine reiterated his opposition to the amendment Tuesday, saying the wording is so broad that it could interfere with a variety of legal agreements between same-sex and unmarried heterosexual couples.

"The constitution shouldn't include language taking away rights in vague or unnecessary ways," he said.

Kaine was joined at a morning news conference by his wife, Anne Holton, and her parents, former Gov. Linwood Holton and his wife, Jinks.

Anne Holton, a former juvenile and domestic relations court judge, warned that the amendment could be used to challenge child custody arrangements between unmarried heterosexual adults, such as a mother and grandmother.

Attorney General Bob

McDonnell, who supports the amendment, issued a statement saying the concerns raised by Kaine and his family are "completely wrong and legally unsupportable." He and Lt. Gov. Bill Bolling have scheduled a news conference for today to explain their support for the amendment.