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Gay Married Man in Florida Is Approved for Green Card

By [JULIA PRESTON](#)

An American man in Florida and his husband, who is from Bulgaria, have become the first same-sex married couple to be approved for a permanent resident visa, [an immigration milestone](#) that comes after the [Supreme Court struck down a federal law against same-sex marriage](#).

The notice of approval of a permanent visa, known as a green card, was issued by e-mail late Friday to Traian Popov, a Bulgarian immigrant who lives with his American spouse, Julian Marsh, in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. The approval was evidence that the Obama administration was acting swiftly to change its visa policies in the wake of the court's decision on Wednesday invalidating the Defense of Marriage Act, or DOMA.

The approval came so fast that it took the couple's immigration lawyer, Lavi Soloway, by surprise. Mr. Soloway, who represents many same-sex couples, said he received the official message while he was attending the annual conference in San Francisco of the [American Immigration Lawyers Association](#).

"I thought, 'Am I reading this wrong?'" Mr. Soloway said in an interview on Saturday. Although it was a professional setting, he said, he began to weep with emotion when he realized the significance of the notice.

The Supreme Court's decision has had a significant impact in cases involving United States citizens who are seeking green cards for foreign spouses of the same sex. DOMA, which defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman, had prohibited the federal government from recognizing same-sex marriages as the grounds for any visa.

Speaking by telephone on Sunday from the couple's home, Mr. Marsh said that he turned 55 on Friday and that he and Mr. Popov were celebrating with dinner at a Red Lobster restaurant when they received news of the unprecedented green card.

"It was just kind of a shock, like winning the lottery," said Mr. Marsh, [a music producer](#). "The amazing overwhelming fact is that the government said yes, and my husband and I can live in the country we chose and we love and want to stay in."

Mr. Popov, 41, said he had been living legally in the United States for 15 years with a series of student visas. He has completed three master's degrees, he said, and is working on a doctorate in social science at Nova Southeastern University in Florida. The couple married in New York last year, and they applied for a green card in February.

Immigration officials said the visa agency, [United States Immigration and Citizenship Services](#), would announce new procedures early this week for same-sex binational couples seeking green cards. The first approval was also supposed to be issued this week, officials acknowledged, but eager officers at the agency pressed the button on the notice on Friday.

For the last two years, the agency has kept a list of same-sex couples whose green card petitions were denied, the officials said, anticipating that the Supreme Court would eventually weigh in on DOMA. Those denials will now be reversed without couples having to present new applications, if no other issues have arisen. Gay couples with no denials, like Mr. Marsh and Mr. Popov, will move through the system at the same pace as traditional spouses, officials said.

Mr. Popov said he would work to quickly finish his doctorate since he will now be able to seek a job legally. He and Mr. Marsh said they also planned to become same-sex marriage activists in Florida, a state that does not recognize such unions. “We are first-class citizens in New York and in the eyes of the federal government, but second-class citizens in Florida,” Mr. Marsh said. “We won’t stand for that.”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/01/us/gay-married-man-in-florida-is-approved-for-green-card.html>