

Authorization to Celebrate Marriages in the DMV (District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia)

Each of our three jurisdictions have differing requirements regarding who is authorized to perform a civil marriage and how to obtain authorization to perform a civil marriage.

District of Columbia

Information for marriage officiants in the District of Columbia are contained in section 46-406 of the D.C. Code, <http://dccode.org/simple/sections/46-406.html>. Ministers, priests, rabbis, or authorized persons of any religious denomination or society may officiate at weddings. An application and a \$35 fee is required. The minister's signature on the application must be notarized. Officiant applications can be accessed here: <https://www.dccourts.gov/services/marriage-matters>.

Maryland

In Maryland, any official of a religious order or body authorized by the rules and customs of that order or body to perform a marriage ceremony can officiate at a marriage ceremony. There is no application and no information needed from the religious body. The officiant must sign the marriage license, provide his or her title, and return it to the clerk of the court that issued the license. Maryland Code sections involving marriage are:

<https://law.justia.com/codes/maryland/2016/family-law/title-2/subtitle-4/section-2-406/>
<https://law.justia.com/codes/maryland/2016/family-law/title-2/subtitle-4/section-2-409/>

Virginia

Getting authorization to officiate at a Virginia wedding is more complex and confusing. The law permits ministers to perform ceremonies: <https://vacode.org/20-23/>, but each county has different requirements. Here, for example, is what Alexandria requires: https://alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/clerkofcourt/minister_requirements_web.pdf. This is what Fairfax County requires: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/circuit/marriage/religious-celebrant-authorization>. And Loudoun County seems to have hidden the application for in-state clergy to conduct religious ceremonies: <https://www.loudoun.gov/index.aspx?NID=3681>. Call the phone number at the bottom of the page to see if they have an application. Here is information for Arlington County: <https://courts.arlingtonva.us/circuit-court/marriage/>. **NB:** Fairfax County requires notarized applications—the other Virginia jurisdictions listed above do not. Once one gets approval to officiate at a wedding from any county in Virginia the minister is authorized to perform civil marriage ceremonies in all counties in Virginia. So, an authorization from Arlington County is sufficient to permit a minister to perform a marriage in Fairfax County. In order to be authorized to perform marriage ceremonies in Virginia, ministers will have to get a letter of good standing from the presbytery. The Presbytery office can provide notary services if this is needed.

Bulletin: a recent Virginia Court case found that a wedding conducted in the District of Columbia with a Virginia marriage license was not a valid marriage. If there is a Virginia marriage license, the wedding must take place in Virginia.