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'Til 2013 do us part? Mexico mulls 2-year marriage

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MEXICO CITY (Reuters) - Mexico City lawmakers want to help newlyweds avoid the hassle of divorce by giving them an easy exit strategy: temporary marriage licenses.

Leftists in the city's assembly -- who have already riled conservatives by legalizing gay marriage -- proposed a reform to the civil code this week that would allow couples to decide on the length of their commitment, opting out of a lifetime.

The minimum marriage contract would be for two years and could be renewed if the couple stays happy. The contracts would include provisions on how children and property would be handled if the couple splits.

"The proposal is, when the two-year period is up, if the relationship is not stable or harmonious, the contract simply ends," said Leonel Luna, the Mexico City assemblyman who co-authored the bill.

"You wouldn't have to go through the tortuous process of divorce," said Luna, from the leftist Party of the Democratic Revolution, which has the most seats in the 66-member chamber.

Luna says the proposed law is gaining support and he expects a vote by the end of this year.

Around half of Mexico City marriages end in divorce, usually in the first two years.

The bustling capital, one of the world's largest cities, is much more liberal than the rest of the country, where the divorce rate is significantly lower although on the rise.

Abortion is legal in Mexico City, while the Supreme Court ruled this week to uphold state laws in Baja California that say life begins at conception.

Leftist Mayor Marcelo Ebrard, who angered the Catholic Church when he made Mexico City the first Latin American city to legalize gay marriage in late 2009, announced this month he would soon step down to run for president.

The church criticized the proposed change.

"This reform is absurd. It contradicts the nature of marriage," said Hugo Valdemar, spokesman for the Mexican archdiocese. "It's another one of these electoral theatrics the assembly tends to do that are irresponsible and immoral."

The Church holds considerable sway in the country with the world's second largest Catholic population after Brazil.

(Reporting by Alex Leff; Editing by Cynthia Osterman)



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