



HOW REDEFINING MARRIAGE IMPACTS THE ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON'S SOCIAL SERVICE MINISTRIES

Recent news reports have mistakenly claimed that the Archdiocese of Washington and Catholic Charities are threatening to cease providing social services in the District of Columbia if the proposed bill to legalize same-sex marriage is passed.

Catholic Charities vows to continue its services if a same-sex marriage bill passes

Serving people who are poor and needy is essential to the practice of our faith. *"Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me."* (Matthew 25:40) For the last 80 years, we have heeded the Gospel call to serve those in need without regard to race, gender, creed, nationality and sexual orientation, and we always will. However, the Council's legislation, as it now reads, will diminish the resources we have to do so. If a meaningful religious exemption is not added to the bill to permit us to observe Catholic teachings on marriage, we will be forced to choose between these two beliefs. We fear the bill may render us ineligible for contracts and licenses from the city to continue providing services.

Where the legislation stands

On November 10, the D.C. Council's Committee on Public Safety and the Judiciary approved the bill (18-482), the "Religious Freedom and Marriage Equality Amendment Act," without adding the needed exemption. The bill has now advanced to the full Council and could be voted on very soon. Representatives of the Archdiocese explained in testimony before the Committee in October the need for this exemption. That testimony is available at www.marriagemattersdc.org.

What we are asking

If the Council moves forward to redefine marriage, the Archdiocese urges that the bill be amended to allow religious organizations and individuals to provide services in a manner that does not compromise their religious teachings and beliefs. The American Civil Liberties Union, the InterFaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington, and a group of nationally-recognized legal scholars also urged greater protection for religious freedom.

Why an exemption is needed

An exemption protecting religious freedom is critically important for all, but perhaps most for Catholic Charities - the largest non-governmental provider of social services in the District. For decades, Catholic Charities has been one of the most reliable and capable partners of the City in caring for its neediest residents. It is fiscally responsible, highly qualified to do the work, and deeply invested in the well-being of those in need. Catholic Charities is firmly committed to this mission, which is derived from our faith.

However, Catholic Charities observes the Catholic belief that marriage is the union of man and woman. It cannot place children with same-sex parents in foster care and adoption; it cannot promote and support same-sex marriage through payment of spousal benefits. The bill would compel Catholic Charities to do both of these. Catholic Charities cannot comply with these requirements.

The bill would affect a wide range of Gospel-driven ministries

For all contracts and grants, the District requires Catholic Charities to certify its compliance with D.C. laws, including contracts for homeless shelters, mental health services, foster care and more. Catholic Charities will not be able to comply with this bill if it becomes law as currently written. So, the City will withhold government contracts and licenses. Catholic Charities' ability to provide these services that the City has relied on for generations will be reduced by this change in the law.

Catholic Charities is not a beneficiary of government funding; instead, the beneficiaries are those whom Catholic Charities serves. Government funds are granted to accomplish a state objective and are conditioned on their use toward that end. Catholic Charities adds \$10 million in donations and thousands of hours of volunteer work to those programs supported by government funds.

This is about sincerely held religious beliefs on marriage, not discrimination. The Church simply wants to be allowed to carry out its mission to serve without abandoning its beliefs about the nature of marriage. The Council cannot require the Church to conform to a definition of marriage that violates its sincerely held religious beliefs, but the City can refuse to contract with the Church. However, it is possible for the Council to find a balance in this legislation, as other states have done. We believe the Council can amend this bill in a way that protects all interests involved.

