



How the Archdiocese of Washington is working to find a solution in the best interests of all involved

Where the Legislation Stands

Recently the Archdiocese of Washington sent an alert that the District of Columbia City Council was nearing a vote on legalizing same sex marriage in the District of Columbia. That bill (18-482) is set for a vote in the full Council on December 1, 2009. It will require a second vote before it can be enacted, possibly before the end of December. The Archdiocese continues to oppose the bill and efforts to redefine marriage. However, because this bill has 10 co-sponsors in a 13-member Council, it is likely to pass. Our efforts therefore have focused on finding a balanced solution.

Why Our Concerns Remain

As the United States bishops recently stated, the legal recognition of same sex marriages “affects all people, married and non-married: not only at the fundamental levels of the good of the spouses, the good of children, the intrinsic dignity of every human person, and the common good, but also at the levels of education, cultural imagination and influence, and religious freedom.”

Religious freedom is at the heart of our debate and it is the very principle we defend when we urge the Council to include an exemption for religious organizations in this bill.

Why Our Concerns are Reasonable

In every state where same sex marriage has been legalized through the legislature, the final bills have made room for the free exercise of religion. As the scope of the legal debate surrounding same sex unions has evolved from one previously limited to domestic partnerships to one addressing same sex marriage, the need for protecting religious liberty has become even more pressing. Laws enacted in other states in the last few months have shown that it is possible to address such interests while preserving religious freedoms. Particularly in the District of Columbia, where protective federal statutes come into play, this balanced approach must be used as a guide to developing fair provisions for this bill.

Committed to Finding a Balance

The Archdiocese has sought to work with

the Council to craft a bill that more fairly balances the interests of all involved. Representatives of the Archdiocese have continued to reach out to council members to explain why a meaningful religious exemption must be included in the bill. The Archbishop has written, publicly and privately, to urge the Council to amend this bill in a way that protects all interests involved, in particular, those of the most vulnerable.

Focused on the Facts

Sadly, much of the public discussion has been presented in the framework of words like “ultimatums” and “threats” supposedly made by the Archdiocese of Washington or Catholic Charities, even though this is not true. The Archdiocese recognizes the Council intends to legalize same sex marriage. All we have asked for is an opportunity to work with the Council to fashion legislation that makes room for everyone so we can all continue to work for the good of this community.

Committed to Serve

The Archdiocese of Washington and our agencies, including Catholic Charities, will continue to serve those in need without regard to race, gender, creed, nationality and sexual orientation, as we have for over 80 years, with the resources available to us. If governmental restrictions diminish those resources, we will look for other ways to replace them. A properly crafted religious exemption would help to protect ministries that serve the residents of this city. The Archdiocese and the Council should be able to work together to fashion a solution that achieves the best possible results for the people of the District of Columbia.

Why an Exemption Is a Workable Solution

The Church cannot abandon its beliefs about the nature and meaning of marriage. It can, instead, offer respect for other peoples’ views, yet reasonably request that all religious interests be protected. The Archdiocese is committed to a dignified debate in the public square, and encourages mutual respect for all persons participating in this dialogue. Because a reasonable accommodation on this issue seems possible, the Archdiocese believes both sides should mutually agree to work towards it.

For more information, visit www.MarriageMattersDC.org.

