

Bill to codify same-sex marriage called attack on religious freedom

HARTFORD, Conn. – For the second time in as many months, Connecticut’s Catholic bishops used weekend Masses to urge parishioners to fight proposed legislation that they said attacks religious freedom.

Pulpit announcements read in churches statewide April 18 and 19 called on Catholics to help defeat a Senate bill that seeks to codify the Connecticut Supreme Court’s ruling last October legalizing same-sex marriage but that “fails to protect the First Amendment rights of individuals, religious organizations and related societies.”

“Last month, Catholics across Connecticut joined with fellow citizens in sending a strong message to the state Legislature: Religious liberty must never be violated,” the bishops said in the pulpit announcement.

The bishops were referring to a March 11 rally that drew 5,000 people for a rally outside Connecticut’s state Capitol in Hartford to protest a bill – pulled from the Legislature the previous day – that would have given laypeople financial control of their parishes.

“Your swift and decisive action brought down Senate Bill 1098, which was a direct attack on the Catholic Church. We thank you for your courage in speaking out,” they said.

“We need you to speak out again. Now we are facing another attack on our religious liberty. It is very serious and must be stopped now,” they added.

Churchgoers in the Hartford Archdiocese and the Bridgeport Diocese also received letters from their bishops and information about how to contact their lawmakers.

In his letter, Archbishop Henry J. Mansell of Hartford said the measure “does not guarantee the First Amendment rights of clergy, religious and laity to practice their faith and operate their programs and services in accordance with their sincerely

held religious beliefs.”

Because it does not provide full conscience protection, the archbishop wrote, “individuals and religious groups, particularly those that provide social and educational services, would be subject to civil harassment in the form of lawsuits.”

“The state of Connecticut could try to coerce religious groups by giving grants, contracts and licenses only to organizations that recognize and support same-sex marriage,” he said.

Developments outside Connecticut are heightening the bishops’ concern, the archbishop wrote.

He pointed to Catholic Charities in the Boston Archdiocese deciding to abandon its adoption services after the legalizing of same-sex marriage in Massachusetts rather than be forced to place children with same-sex couples. In Canada, a Knights of Columbus group that refused to rent its hall for a same-sex wedding reception was slapped with a fine, he wrote.

The proposed bill in Connecticut would repeal a provision in the current law that “protects our children from government indoctrination in sexual lifestyles ... that are contrary to our beliefs,” the archbishop wrote.

The bishops asked Catholics to urge their lawmakers to vote “no” on the Senate bill and they listed lawmakers by district, providing phone numbers, political party affiliations and e-mail addresses.

The bishops’ campaign coincides with media ads being sponsored by the Family Institute of Connecticut and the Knights of Columbus. Full-page advertisements in most daily newspapers feature an image of a formal invitation, which reads: “You’re Cordially Invited to Witness Your Rights Being Taken Away.”

The ads urge readers to contact lawmakers to ask them to vote against the proposed bill, because it “will deny citizens their religious rights.”

The ads also claim that under the measure schools will have to teach about gay marriage, even if they do not want to, “church groups who won’t comply will be

punished by the government” and “businesses will have to close their doors.”