

Catholic leaders implore parishioners to contact Maryland delegates on same-sex marriage bill

As the full House of Delegates prepares to begin what is expected to be an intense debate on legalizing same-sex marriage in Maryland, Mary Ellen Russell is imploring Catholics to contact their delegates and make their voices heard on the issue.

The House Judiciary Committee voted 12-10 to approve the bill March 4, following a narrow Feb. 24 vote in the State Senate to do the same.

If the bill gets 71 votes in the House, it will pass and Gov. Martin J. O'Malley has promised to sign it into law.

"It's imperative that our lawmakers hear from us," said Russell, executive director of the Maryland Catholic Conference, legislative lobbying arm of the state's Catholic bishops.

Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien joined Washington Cardinal Donald Wuerl and Wilmington Bishop W. Francis Malooly in issuing an urgent appeal Feb. 28, strongly encouraging Catholics to contact their lawmakers (see story).

"The debate is not yet over," they said. "A solid number of the members of Maryland's House of Delegates remain opposed to redefining marriage. They need to be assured by you immediately that they have the support of the majority of their constituents in rejecting this legislation."

The bishops said the haste with which the measure is moving through the legislative process is "unprecedented."

The Maryland Catholic Conference has prepared a question-and-answer page on marriage to help Catholics speak to their lawmakers and others on the issue.

The statement notes that "drastically altering" the legal definition of marriage in

Maryland by recognizing same-sex marriage is not necessary to achieve benefits because they already exist in law.

“Instead,” the statement concludes, “approving a same-sex marriage bill would significantly undermine the legal, social, and cultural status of marriage that is appropriately assigned only to the union of one man and one woman.”

Because the legislation could face a vote next week, Catholic leaders emphasized the importance of contacting lawmakers as soon as possible.

Visit www.mdcathcon.org for information on contacting your lawmakers and accessing the Q&A page on marriage.