

Catholics urged to defend marriage

As a State Senate committee prepares to consider a bill legalizing same-sex marriage, leaders of the Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) are urging Catholics throughout the state to speak up in defense of traditional marriage.

The MCC is the public-policy arm of the state's Catholic bishops.

The Judicial Proceedings Committee will hold a Feb. 8 public hearing in Annapolis on Senate Bill 116, a measure that would alter the state's current definition of marriage as being between a man and a woman.

In a Jan. 20 statement, the MCC said the proposal would "drastically alter a social institution that derives from our human nature as men and women."

"Our focus as a society should be on strengthening marriage," it said, "not dismantling it altogether, especially when the harmful effects of the erosion of marriage are so apparent."

The statement noted that treating heterosexual and same-sex relationships differently is not unjust discrimination.

"Stripping marriage of its unique connection to parenthood erases from law the right of a child to a mother and father," the statement said, "and ignores an essential question of why government favors marriage between one man and one woman over all other relationships."

Mary Ellen Russell, MCC executive director, told The Catholic Review that materials have been provided to every parish in the state with information on how Catholics can contact their senators.

Russell acknowledged that the bill has numerous co-sponsors and significant support.

"But, she said, "it's clear to me that the vote on the floor in both chambers is by no means certain. I think as long as a sufficient number of people make their voices heard in support of marriage, I don't think the bill will pass."

Russell said the Catholic Church respects the dignity of all people, including homosexuals. She also pointed out that Maryland has already granted many rights to domestic partnerships - such as medical decision-making, hospital visitation rights and exemptions from real estate transfer and inheritance taxes.

Russell will testify against the bill at the hearing.

Visit www.mdcathcon.org for more information.