

Governor to sign marriage bills

Despite a written plea from Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien for Gov. Martin J. O'Malley to veto two domestic partnership bills, the governor was expected to sign the controversial measures into law as The Catholic Review went to press May 20.

Christine Hansen, the governor's deputy press secretary, told The Catholic Review the governor planned to sign them during a May 22 signing ceremony.

Senate Bill 566 grants unmarried couples the same status as married couples for making medical decisions, while Senate Bill 597 establishes in law a definition of domestic partner and gives domestic partnerships marriage-equivalency status in parts of tax law.

In his letter to the governor, Archbishop O'Brien said the bills would "significantly erode" the definition of marriage as being between a man and a woman.

"In each of the measures, the definition of domestic partnership not only gives a status equivalent to marriage to same-sex couples, but also is so broad and ambiguous that it can be extended to the most casual of relationships - relationships that can easily be entered into and just as easily dissolved; relationships that assume scarce few of the obligations associated with committed marriages," Archbishop O'Brien said.

The archbishop said the measures would give a "positive legal sanction to behavior that overtly contradicts the understanding of marriage held by faith traditions and civil society since civilization's onset."

Ms. Hansen said the governor received and read the archbishop's letter.

"The governor respects the views of the Catholic Church, but, in this case, believes individuals should have equal protection under the law," she said.

Referring to California's passage of domestic partnership laws several years ago, Maryland Catholic Conference Executive Director Richard J. Dowling said, "Maryland is well on its way to becoming California East."

In a recent ruling, the California high court said domestic partnerships and marriage cannot coexist under the same constitutional roof – opening up the possibility that the marriage designation may soon apply to same-sex couples in California, Mr. Dowling said.

The two measures supported by Gov. O'Malley “start us down the road California has taken,” Mr. Dowling warned.

“Next year and the year after that, same-sex marriage proponents will be back, pushing for additional privileges, and if Maryland lawmakers are as compliant as they were this year, they’ll get them,” he said. “It won’t be long then before Maryland domestic partners have all the rights of married couples, and Maryland’s high court will be asked the same question its California counterpart decided last week.”