

# Long, hot summer on legislative front

The Maryland General Assembly may not be in session, but that doesn't mean that there is not a lot going on in the public policy arena. Some of the activity is driven by events within Maryland, but actions in New York and even as far away as California are having an impact in our state. All this makes for a busy summer for those who are watching issues of concern to the church.

The DREAM Act that passed in Maryland has been challenged by a petition drive that seeks to stall its implementation. If enough signatures are verified, the measure – which would allow children of undocumented aliens to attend community colleges and eventually a state university at in-state tuition rates – would be put on hold until it is put on the ballot in November 2012.

The law provides in-state rates to high school graduates who have attended high school for three years in Maryland. They or their parents or guardians would have to provide proof they paid Maryland taxes for three years. Those undocumented immigrants benefiting from the in-state rate would also be required to sign an affidavit stating that they will apply for permanent residency within 30 days of becoming eligible to do so. But the law was almost immediately challenged.

Mary Ellen Russell, executive director of the Maryland Catholic Conference, says the bishops of Maryland encourage Catholics not to sign the petition. “Maryland’s Catholics and all Marylanders are urged not to participate in the petition drive which will put the law on hold and therefore needlessly inhibit Maryland’s undocumented immigrant students from attending community college because they cannot afford the out-of-state tuition rates,” she said.

She also noted that the U.S. Supreme Court recently declined to take up a challenge to the constitutionality of a similar law in California, indicating that Maryland’s law, patterned after the Golden State’s legislation, would hold up as well.

Meanwhile, in New York State, passage last week of a law allowing same-sex marriage mirrors in some ways the efforts that Maryland barely averted in the

legislative session that recently ended. Gay marriage proponents are celebrating now in New York, despite the attempts by New York's Catholic bishops and many others to stop the bill. Brooklyn Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio, in a statement, said, "More than half of all New Yorkers oppose this legislation.

"Yet the governor and the state Legislature have demonized people of faith, whether they be Muslims, Jews or Christians, and identified them as bigots and prejudiced" if they opposed changing the fundamental definition of marriage, he added.

It is likely that, emboldened by the success in New York, same-sex marriage proponents will introduce legislation in Maryland again next session. Those who support and defend traditional marriage in Maryland will need to remain vigilant over the next several months.

The Baltimore mayoral race will bring to the fore at least one topic of interest to the church and its people. Announced candidate Otis Rolley has said he wants to make certain that students at the five worst-performing middle schools can attend any school they or their parents choose by providing \$10,000 in education vouchers to be used at Catholic and other nonpublic schools in Baltimore.

At a news conference, Rolley responded to a question from The Catholic Review by saying that he sees Catholic schools as allies – not enemies – in the common goal of educating children. "When I think of city kids in city schools, it's public, parochial and independent schools," he said. "All of these kids are our kids. All of these schools are our schools."

In-state tuition, same-sex marriage and school vouchers are all hot-button issues, and all of them will be part of the landscape in the next few months. It's not the time to drop our guard. For information on how you can stay informed on the issues through the Maryland Catholic Advocacy Network, visit <https://capwiz.com/mdcath/home/> and get involved.

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