

Marriage in Maryland placed at risk with introduction of same-sex marriage bill

The release of legislation today to redefine marriage once again attempts to impose the influence of special interest groups on the people of Maryland, despite the vehement protest of faith groups and grassroots constituents that led to the defeat of similar legislation last year. At a time when Marylanders are struggling to find jobs, keep their homes and feed their families, our elected officials should focus their attention on the pressing needs of the state, not on dismantling Maryland's long-standing law defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

The bill's limited exemptions for religious organizations remain ambiguous and by no means cover the host of circumstances that would create a conflict between the government and faith institutions if marriage is redefined. Moreover, the exemptions do nothing to address religious liberties for the average citizen.

Most importantly, our concern about redefining marriage rests on the impact such a drastic change would have on all society. No changes to the bill can change that fundamental fact, and we continue to count on lawmakers who were steadfast in their opposition to this legislation last year to recognize the value of upholding marriage for all the people of Maryland.

The more Marylanders hear about efforts to redefine marriage, the more they are saying no. Despite a video campaign featuring a few elite Marylanders designed to sway grassroots opinion for same-sex marriage - especially among the African-American community - polling shows that not much has changed.

What has changed? **Support among African-Americans has fallen by eight percentage points** - from 41 percent in favor of same-sex marriage in October 2011 to 33% in favor in this month's poll by Gonzales Research & Marketing Strategies. The poll showed that 47 percent of registered voters opposed redefining marriage, up from 44 percent in January, with 4 percent undecided.

More and more Marylanders also recognize that redefining marriage is not a question of civil rights. It is clear that there are other avenues for granting certain rights and benefits to couples who are not married. 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. There are many ways to protect basic human rights; sacrificing marriage is not one of them.

Our state's marriage statute is not an arbitrary recognition of one relationship among many possibilities. This recognition – bestowed on marriage by societies throughout human history – originates in a simple biological fact. The union of one man and one woman is the only human relationship capable of creating children and nurturing them together as father and mother.

We continue to urge all members of the Maryland General Assembly not to allow this issue to be driven by partisan politics, and to give full and fair consideration to the legitimate reasons why a groundswell of Marylanders believe our state should maintain its recognition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

Maryland Catholic Conference *advocates for the Church's public policy positions before the Maryland General Assembly and other civil officials. The Conference represents all three dioceses with territory in the state – the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington.*