

MCC: General Assembly session ‘tremendously disappointing’

By Maria Wiering

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State funding for education, law enforcement and foster care will face cuts if Gov. Martin O'Malley does not call a special session of the state's General Assembly. The Legislature's 2012 session ended April 9 with lawmakers failing to pass a state budget, which triggered a so-called "doomsday" budget, which includes more than \$500 million in cuts scheduled to take effect July 1.

General Assembly leadership is calling for O'Malley to request a special session to give lawmakers more time to pass a budget, but the governor wants leadership to craft a budget deal first, according to reports.

Mary Ellen Russell, Maryland Catholic Conference executive director, said she hopes the lawmakers will reconvene to solve these budget issues. She called the 2012 General Assembly's outcome "tremendously disappointing."

"Everyone throughout the state is dismayed at the inability of the Legislature to resolve the most elemental issue that they come together every year, which is to pass the budget, which addresses the critically important needs of the people of the state," Russell said.

The "doomsday" budget concerns the MCC because it includes cuts to programs affecting vulnerable populations, including the Developmental Disabilities Administration, Russell said.

Russell attributes the Legislature's failure to pass a budget to the large amount of time it dedicated to legalizing same-sex marriage. O'Malley signed the measure into law March 1. It is scheduled to take effect in 2013, but MCC-supported efforts are underway to bring the bill to popular vote as a referendum on November's ballot.

"So much of our time was eaten up over the issue of redefining marriage against the will of most people in Maryland, when the time would have been much better spent balancing our state books and solving the perennial problem of our structural deficit," Russell said.

Some lawmakers are also still hoping to pass a measure that would expand gambling in Maryland, a measure opposed by the MCC, which advocates for the public policy interests of Maryland's bishops.

The MCC testified in support of several bills that failed to pass this session, including those that would repeal the death penalty, require abortion providers to report abortion statistics, and create a tax credit for businesses that financially

support non-public and public schools.

The “doomsday budget” preserves \$4.4 million in state funding for nonreligious textbooks and technology in nonpublic schools.

This session “will clearly go on record as one of the most unproductive sessions,” Russell said.

The MCC hopes next year’s legislative session will be more productive, Russell said.

“I hope that we have all learned our lesson, and next year we will be better able to tackle what’s really important to the people of Maryland,” she said.

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