

New York bishops reiterate opposition to same-sex marriage legislation

ALBANY, N.Y. - Reaffirming an earlier statement outlining their reasons for opposing any change in the legal definition of marriage, the Catholic bishops of New York state called for the defeat of legislation proposed by New York Gov. David A. Paterson to permit same-sex marriages.

"The most elementary study of history, sociology, biology or theology points to the certain truth that marriage is the union of one man and one woman, which the state should not and must not attempt to alter," the bishops said in a June 2008 statement released April 16 to coincide with Gov. Paterson's announcement of the legislation.

The conference, public policy arm of the state's eight dioceses, "calls on the Legislature to defeat this proposal, for which there is no compelling state interest and which will weaken rather than strengthen the institution of marriage, which is so important to a stable society," said a message published with the 2008 statement.

Calling the proposal "landmark civil rights legislation" that would recognize the "fundamental civil right of marriage," Gov. Paterson said at a New York press conference, "Marriage equality is about basic civil rights and personal freedom."

His bill would amend the state's Domestic Relations Law to allow same-sex couples to enter into civil marriage and would require the interpretation of all existing state laws to permit same-sex marriages, whether they use gender-specific or gender-neutral terms.

But the bishops said in 2008 that recognition of same-sex marriages or civil unions would "represent a destructive development for our state."

"Numerous theological and religious arguments could be advanced as to why same-sex unions should be rejected," they said. "However, this is not simply a matter of theology, and religious values are not the sole source of opposition to this plan."

“Marriage always has been, is now and always will be a union of one man and one woman in an enduring bond,” the statement said. “This is consistent with biology and natural law, and should be obvious to all, no matter what their religion, or even if they have no religion at all.”

The bishops disputed the claim that traditional marriage “is a form of unjust discrimination against homosexual persons.” Such discrimination, they said, “is wrong and must be opposed by everyone.”

“But the state need not ignore the realities of natural law or discard thousands of years of human tradition to address such issues,” they added.

“As Catholic bishops, we want to make absolutely clear that our firm beliefs about marriage and against the governor’s proposal must not be misconstrued to be in any way a condemnation of homosexual people or an attack on their human dignity,” the statement said.

The bishops urged a review of existing state laws to determine if there is discrimination against unmarried couples and urged legislators to “fashion legislative remedies” in such cases.

But they said “the question of such benefits should not be allowed to cloud the discussion because, in truth, the movement for ‘same-sex marriage’ is less about such benefits as it is about societal acceptance and approval of homosexual relationships.”

“But it is not the business of the state to attempt to legislate such approval,” they added.

The legislation proposed by Gov. Paterson includes a provision that any member of the clergy who did not wish to participate in a same-sex marriage could not be compelled to do so.