

# **Pittsburgh bishop testifies for Marriage Protection Amendment**

PITTSBURGH – Bishop David A. Zubik of Pittsburgh was among those who testified on behalf of Pennsylvania’s proposed Marriage Protection Amendment at a hearing April 10 at the Allegheny County Courthouse.

More than 200 people packed the chambers of the Allegheny County Council to hear the often-spirited debate.

“That marriage must be considered truly sacred seems to elude us,” Bishop Zubik said. “We have reached the point of a laissez faire view of marriage, a concerted effort to expand its definition so vaguely that marriage essentially becomes meaningless.

“At a time when we should be engaged in doing all we can to strengthen marriage, and strengthen especially the family, we are facing cultural forces that want to so water down the definition of marriage that it could apply to any human relationship, or to no relationship at all,” he said.

The bishop’s testimony came before the Senate Judiciary Committee, chaired by state Sen. Stewart Greenleaf.

The bill, S.B. 1250, would amend the state constitution to read: “No union other than a marriage between one man and one woman shall be valid or recognized as marriage or the functional equivalent of marriage by the commonwealth.”

To date, 27 states have amended their constitutions to protect marriage. Supporters of the Pennsylvania proposal say it is needed to protect marriage between one man and one woman from redefinition or the legalization of “civil unions.”

Among the arguments against S.B. 1250 was that it would contradict legislation passed by the city of Pittsburgh that granted domestic partnership rights.

Douglas Shields, Pittsburgh City Council president, said passage of the amendment

could inhibit the city from attracting skilled workers. Instead, he urged the legislators to adopt S.B. 761, which would extend Pittsburgh's anti-discrimination protection to the entire state.

Testifying with the bishop in support of the amendment was Rita Ferko Joyce, general counsel of the diocese.

She noted that the wording of the Pittsburgh ordinance is simply to extend benefits to certain individuals, not to define or redefine marriage or to regulate it.

"Clearly the ordinance and the amendment do not address the same issue, thus the amendment will not invalidate the city's law," she said. "The ordinance provides benefits to a certain specific group of people, while the amendment proposes to set forth the concept of marriage between a man and a woman as the foundation of the family and our society."

Ms. Joyce stated that the city ordinance does not address a functional equivalent of marriage. She noted, however, that the words "functional equivalent of marriage" in S.B. 1250 are meaningful and prevent a parallel structure that gives rights and privileges of marriage to unmarried people of the same sex.

She said those who work for the church are not about denying benefits, and they advocate that employment benefits are fundamental human rights. The Catholic Church supports the amendment because of the beliefs and traditions that marriage and family are central social institutions that must be supported.

"It affirms the benefits of marriage in our society, affirms that marriage has been and is the foundation of the family and protects children," she said. "As a culture and society, we cannot afford at this time to have the status of traditional marriage redefined."

Ms. Joyce stated that without a constitutional amendment, "marriage in the commonwealth could be redefined by the courts in a judicial decision." She said citizens of the state should be allowed to speak on the issue by allowing the amendment to move forward.