

Same-sex marriage approval undermines families, New York bishops say

ALBANY, N.Y. - Following passage of legislation to allow same-sex marriage in the state, the Catholic bishops of New York expressed concern “that both marriage and family will be undermined by this tragic presumption of government.”

In a June 24 statement, the heads of the state’s eight Catholic dioceses said they were “deeply disappointed and troubled” at approval of a bill that will “alter radically and forever humanity’s historic understanding of marriage.”

The state Senate passed the measure 33-29 in an evening vote June 24, and New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, a Democrat and a Catholic, signed it into law later that night. Unless it is delayed by legal challenges, it will take effect in late July.

New York would then become the sixth state to permit same-sex marriage. It currently is allowed in Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont, in addition to the District of Columbia.

The bishops said the true definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman “cannot change, though we realize that our beliefs about the nature of marriage will continue to be ridiculed, and that some will even now attempt to enact government sanctions against churches and religious organizations that preach these timeless truths.”

The statement was signed by Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan of New York and Bishops Howard J. Hubbard of Albany, Nicholas DiMarzio of Brooklyn, Edward U. Kmiec of Buffalo, Terry R. LaValley of Ogdensburg, Matthew H. Clark of Rochester, William F. Murphy of Rockville Centre and Robert J. Cunningham of Syracuse.

But in a separate statement, Bishop DiMarzio said both Republicans and Democrats had “succumbed to powerful political elites” with their votes, and Cuomo had “opened a new front in the culture wars that are tearing at the fabric of our nation.”

He directed Catholic schools in his diocese “to refuse any distinction or honors” bestowed by Cuomo or by any legislator that voted for same-sex marriage and told pastors and principals “not to invite any state legislator to speak or be present at any parish or school celebration.”

Bishop DiMarzio said the request was intended “as a protest of the corrupt political process in New York state.”

“More than half of all New Yorkers oppose this legislation,” he said. “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.

A last-minute amendment to the legislation exempts any clergy members who decline to perform same-sex weddings and protects any employee “being managed, directed or supervised by or in conjunction with a religious corporation, benevolent order or a not-for-profit corporation.”

It also says failure to provide same-sex ceremonies would not “result in any state or local government action to penalize, withhold benefits, or discriminate against such religious corporation, benevolent order, a not-for-profit corporation operated, supervised or controlled by a religious corporation.”

Bishop DiMarzio said the amendment showed that “our political leaders do not believe their own rhetoric.”

“If they did, how in good conscience could they carve out any exemption for institutions that would be proponents of bigotry and prejudice?” he asked.