

Senate committee sends gay-marriage bill to floor

On a 7-4 vote, the Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee agreed to send a bill legalizing same-sex marriage to the Senate floor. The full chamber is expected to debate the measure the week of Feb. 21, with the Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) projecting a final vote to take place Feb. 28.

In a written statement released after the Feb. 17 committee vote, the MCC said the measure (Senate Bill 116) would “redefine marriage in our state and drastically alter a social institution that derives from our human nature as men and women.”

The MCC said that although the committee added limited religious exemption amendments, the bill continues to provide no protections for an individual’s religious freedoms, “such as those of a clerk forced to issue a marriage license to a same-sex couple.”

“More importantly,” the statement said, “our fundamental concern about redefining marriage is for the sake of our whole society, and particularly for children and their elemental desire to know and ideally to be raised and loved by their biological mother and father.”

The MCC said that “stripping marriage of its unique connection to parenthood erases from law the right of a child to a mother and father and ignores an essential question of why government favors marriage between one man and one woman over all other relationships.”

Catholic leaders have taken a strong stance against same-sex marriage and Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien has repeatedly called on Catholic voters to contact their lawmakers on the issue.

An intense debate is expected in the Senate, where the bill is one vote short of approval. There are only a handful of senators who have not stated their position on the issue.

If the measure is approved in the Senate and wins support in the House of Delegates, Gov. Martin J. O'Malley has promised to sign it into law.