

Statement of the Bishops of Maryland on the Attorney General's Opinion on Recognition of Out-of-State Same-Sex "Marriages"

Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien, Archbishop of Baltimore, joined Maryland-serving bishops, Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl of Washington and Bishop W. Francis Malooly of Wilmington in releasing the following statement.

We take strong exception to Attorney General Douglas F. Gansler's opinion that the state may recognize same-sex "marriages" performed in other jurisdictions. We trust our legislature and the people of Maryland will also object, and will act accordingly to counteract this opinion.

The General Assembly has repeatedly and explicitly upheld Maryland's definition of marriage "between a man and a woman" even as certain limited benefits have been extended to same-sex couples. The opinion correctly notes that federal law does not require Maryland to recognize such marriages. We see a strong possibility that legal avenues to circumvent the legitimate legislative process on a serious public policy issue could be opened. Allowing the decisions of out-of-state jurisdictions or courts to dictate public policy in Maryland undermines the proper role of the legislature and the citizens they represent.

Most importantly, the opinion chips away at our society's foundational institution. The equality of men and women and the dignity of their coming together as husband and wife is not merely a fact of religious faith or an institution established by civil authorities, but a fundamental reality rooted in our human nature and experience. Civil marriage is not simply a union of two people who love and are committed to each other. Marriage is invariably reserved to the union of one man and one woman because of their unique ability to bring children into the world, thus forming a stable and secure foundation for our society.

We respect the dignity of homosexual persons and roundly reject all unjust discrimination against them. Nonetheless, the clear words of Maryland's marriage statute - "only a marriage between a man and a woman is valid in this State" - reflect the convictions of Maryland's citizens and their legislators. This definition has been reaffirmed in recent acts of the General Assembly. The attorney general's opinion demonstrates a fundamental disregard for the nature and purpose of marriage and its impact on society, as well as for the expressed will of the legislature and previous attorney general opinions. We urge lawmakers, the governor, and the courts to uphold the definition of marriage through all appropriate means.