

Washington Archdiocese opposes bill to legalize same-sex marriage

WASHINGTON – A bill introduced by a member of the District of Columbia City Council Oct. 6 to allow same-sex marriages to be performed in the district could “result in a loss of religious liberty” for its residents, the Archdiocese of Washington warned in a statement opposing the bill.

The measure, called the Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Equality Amendment Act of 2009, states that “marriage is the legally recognized union of two people” and that “any person who otherwise meets the eligibility requirements ... may marry any other eligible person regardless of gender.”

It also calls for the district to phase out its current domestic partnership law. It would allow persons currently in a legally recognized domestic partnership to apply for and receive a marriage license at no charge.

David Catania, the council member who introduced the bill, said the legislation would exclude clergy or religious organizations from having to participate in performing same-sex marriages or providing wedding-related services to such couples.

But Susan Gibbs, the director of communications for the archdiocese, said the way the bill is written religious organizations would not be exempt from renting their spaces for such weddings or related events.

“A number of organizations, including parishes, Knights of Columbus and other religious groups have halls which they rent or make available for the local community. Under this bill, Catholic and other churches who do this would be forced to rent their halls to same-sex couples,” she said.

The archdiocese’s statement said if the bill passes it could “require Catholics to make choices between a ‘law’ and the fundamental teachings of the Catholic Church.”

Noting that “marriage is a personal relationship with public significance,” the archdiocesan statement said efforts to redefine marriage could do serious harm to children.

“Marriage is about more than two people who love and are committed to each other. It also is about creating and nurturing the next generation. As natural law and biology dictate, this requires both a man and a woman,” the statement noted. “Nature intends for children to have a mother and a father. Research tells us a healthy marriage with a father and mother provides the most stable and nurturing environment for a child.”

Washington Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl wrote a pastoral message to homosexual Catholics in the Washington Archdiocese Oct. 6, and in it he stressed that the archdiocesan “support of marriage is not meant to discriminate against any individual or family.”

“The archdiocese’s efforts to affirm marriage and oppose legislative efforts to redefine it flow from the understanding of the nature of marriage and its purpose,” the pastoral states. “Scripture also confirms this reality when it tells us that the union of man and woman coming together to form a communion of mutual support and an openness to creating new life is at the core of God’s plan.”

The archdiocesan statement noted that this is the second time in six months that the City Council has sought to redefine marriage.

Last spring, it passed a bill recognizing same sex marriages from other jurisdictions. Despite opposition from city residents and many clergy, the council passed the measure without the opportunity for residents to give input.

The council is expected to hold hearings on the new bill this fall and put it to a final vote before the end of the year. The measure also would have to be approved by Congress, which has 30 days to review City Council legislation before it becomes law.

A coalition of groups have filed a request with the district’s Board of Elections and Ethics that there be an initiative on the ballot to define marriage as being between a

man and a woman.