

Washington Archdiocese says vote legalizing gay marriage regrettable

WASHINGTON – The Washington Archdiocese expressed regret that a District of Columbia bill to legalize same-sex marriage was approved despite church opposition and without protecting religious freedom.

“Since this legislation was first introduced in October, the Archdiocese of Washington opposed the redefinition of marriage based on the core teaching of the Catholic Church that the complementarity of man and woman is intrinsic to the definition of marriage,” said an archdiocesan statement Dec. 15.

However, the archdiocese said that because “the City Council was committed to legalizing same-sex marriages,” it had advocated for a bill that would balance that action with protecting religious freedom.

The archdiocese’s statement was issued the same day the council voted 11-2 to allow gay couples from anywhere in the country to marry in the city.

The vote was the second of two required on the measure, which was first introduced nearly a year ago. The bill now goes to Mayor Adrian Fenty, who has said he will sign the bill. It also must undergo a 30-day congressional review period.

The archdiocesan statement noted that the district now joins a handful of states where legislatures or courts “have redefined marriage to include persons of the same sex.”

The Washington Archdiocese opposed any effort to redefine marriage as other than that between a man and a woman. The Catholic Church teaches that marriage is a permanent union between one man and one woman.

But archdiocesan officials also argued that the bill would restrict the free exercise of religion and would affect the ability of its Catholic Charities agency to work with the city in serving the poor.

The Dec. 15 archdiocesan statement said the archdiocese and Catholic Charities “are deeply committed to serving those in need, regardless of race, creed, gender, ethnic origin or sexual orientation. This commitment is integral to our Catholic faith and will remain unchanged into the future.”

“Religious organizations have long been eligible to provide social services in our nation’s capital and have not been excluded simply because of their religious character,” the statement said. “This is because the choice of provider has focused on the ability to deliver services effectively and efficiently.

“We are committed to serving the needs of the poor and look forward to working in partnership with the District of Columbia consistent with the mission of the Catholic Church,” it said.

Efforts to legalize same-sex marriage also are under way in New Jersey.

In an evening vote Dec. 7, the state’s Senate Judiciary Committee passed a measure to legalize gay marriage in a 7-6 vote, clearing the way for a full vote by the state Senate, but the measure also has to pass the Assembly.

After the committee vote the New Jersey Catholic Conference, the public policy arm of the New Jersey Catholic bishops, stepped up efforts to convince the state’s senators to vote against the proposed law.

The Catholic conference issued an urgent action alert for all Catholics in the state to contact their senators and urge them to vote against the bill.

The New Jersey bishops, along with a large coalition of rabbis and evangelical and Baptist ministers, have strongly voiced the position that marriage can only be defined as a union between one man and one woman.

With the aid of the Knights of Columbus, a statewide petition drive was conducted in October and 156,000 signatures opposing same-sex marriage were collected and delivered to state officials in anticipation of the vote.