



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE + ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON + DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

Statement on Senate Bill 169, Regarding a Constitutional Amendment Related to Marriage

**Submitted Thursday, February 14, 2008
To the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee**

SUPPORT

This statement of **general support for the concept advanced by Senate Bill 169** is presented on behalf of the Catholic bishops serving Maryland in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington. The measures seek to include within the embrace of the Maryland Constitution the assurance that, in this state and under its laws, valid marriage means a marriage between a man and a woman. The measures also would submit their purpose to Maryland's voters for final determination.

Our position in the matter derives from a view that is not merely the religious outlook of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church is the inheritor of the Western moral tradition; as such, it lifts up moral principles that are based on truths evident to reason and, therefore accessible to all people of good will. In marriage, a husband and a wife make a public and reciprocal commitment, assuming duties to society, to themselves, and to their children. Society and the law rightly reciprocate by bestowing on marriage a juridical status that recognizes the essential role that families play in society, whose permanence they guarantee by fostering the socialization of the young and transmitting such values as charity and compassion, brotherhood and solidarity. The family, based on marriage, is a natural institution that is prior to the state . . . and prior to the Church. The law grants it exclusive privileges because it is the seedbed of future generations.

Our position is in opposition to the application of marriage's juridical status to "*de-facto unions*", whether heterosexual or homosexual. It is not about denying persons the rights that are due them as citizens, or barring individual citizens from participation in public or private programs services and services that are generally accessible. Rather, our position is one of affirmation – we affirm the historic understanding and status of marriage and believe it proper that that affirmation should reside in our state's seminal legal document. Your permitting the people of Maryland to install it there seems to us a logical next and final step in the development of Maryland law in the matter.