

## Catholics confront their lawmakers on same-sex marriage

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ANNAPOLIS – Karen Wingard had never lobbied her lawmakers before, but hearing that Maryland was on the verge of legalizing same-sex marriage provoked her.

“It’s the reason I’m here today,” said Wingard, a



that are being called marriage.”

Klausmeier said she would have preferred a civil-union bill, but such a measure stood no chance of passing. Her choice came down to passing same-sex marriage or doing nothing, she insisted.

“By golly,” she said, “I wish it never would have come around. It’s been hellish for me.”

Klausmeier said amendments were passed in committee that would prevent groups like the Knights of Columbus from being forced to hold same-sex marriage receptions in their halls.

In a written statement, however, the Maryland Catholic Conference noted the bill provides 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.”

Mary Ellen Russell, executive director of the Maryland Catholic Conference, told Lobby Night participants that governments throughout the world have recognized marriage as the union of a man and a woman because of a married couple’s biological ability to bring children into the world.

“That’s the reason government has assigned special protections and special benefits to the relationship between a man and a woman,” she said in a briefing at St. Mary’s High School in Annapolis prior to the legislative meetings.

“It’s not to say anything about any other relationship,” she said. “It’s simply a fact of nature that that’s where we come from and, for the sake of children, we need to continue to protect that definition.”

Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien rejected the arguments of some who he said classify opposition to same-sex marriage as a form of bigotry.

“Thankfully, thousands of you have had the courage to speak up for marriage – respectfully and in a thoughtful manner,” Archbishop O’Brien said. “You have not been silenced by those who falsely claim that our understanding of marriage is based on discrimination.”

Del. Kelly Schulz, a Frederick County Republican who opposes same-sex marriage, told her constituents there is already a widespread grassroots movement to start a referendum to overturn the same-sex measure should it become law.

“I think that we have support from areas where we may not have had support on other issues,” Schulz said. “The fact that it’s going to be coming during a presidential election will bring a very good turnout and I think that will be good for us.”

Lobby Night was sponsored by the Maryland Catholic Conference, public-policy arm of the state’s Catholic bishops.

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