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Nation

Maryland Catholics urged to keep up fight against same-sex marriage

By Catholic News Service
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ANNAPOLIS, Md. (CNS) -- The bishops of Maryland Feb. 28 asked Catholics in their dioceses to keep up the fight against same-sex marriage in their state, saying, "We must not allow our Legislature to redefine marriage."

"The word marriage describes the commitment of a man and a woman to come together for life with the possibility of generating and educating children," the bishops said in a statement. "This is not to say that some people over the ages have not come together in a variety of ways, physical, financial and social. But these various unions have always had other names because they are not marriage."

The statement was signed by Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl of Washington, Baltimore Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien of Baltimore and Bishop W. Francis Malooly of Wilmington, Del. The Washington Archdiocese and the Wilmington Diocese include parishes in Maryland.

The three church leaders commended "the thousands of Maryland Catholics who have raised their voices in recent weeks in support of our society's foundational institution -- the union of one man and one woman in marriage."

"In addition to their thousands of e-mails, phone calls and visits to legislators, over 500 Catholics came out last week (Feb. 21) to visit legislators for the Maryland Catholic Conference's Lobby Night. Your efforts must not abate. The time for continued and urgent action is now."

The bishops criticized the "haste with which this measure is moving through the legislative process," calling it "unprecedented."

The state Senate passed the same-sex marriage bill Feb. 24 in a 25-21 vote. A committee of the House of Delegates opened a hearing on the measure Feb. 25, with a vote by the full House expected to follow quickly. Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley has promised to sign it into law.

The bishops said the bill's passage "by a slim majority of senators" was "regrettable." But the debate is "not over," they said, as "a solid number" of House members "remain opposed to redefining marriage." They urged Catholics to continue to tell their representatives that they have their constituents' support in rejecting same-sex marriage.

The legislation would "drastically alter our state's long-standing definition of marriage," the bishops said.

They also noted it "contains inadequate conscience protections for religious institutions and individuals."

"As a result, the measure would jeopardize the religious freedom of all those who cannot in good conscience recognize marriages that conflict with their sincerely held religious beliefs," they added.

Legalizing same-sex marriage "would lead to the erosion of the family, our society's most valued and important social unit," the bishops said. "The measure would dismantle our state's legal recognition of the true procreative nature of marriage."