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May 27, 2009

Honorable
House of Representatives
<Address 1>
Springfield, IL 62706

Dear _____:

In the closing days of this legislative session, it appears that legislation contained in House Bill 2234 regarding the creation of civil unions may be before you for consideration.

This legislation seeks to legalize civil unions and explicitly grant these unions the same status as marriage in the law. It also ensures any party to a civil union the same legal rights and benefits that are afforded or recognized by the law of Illinois to spouses. There can be no doubt that in the eyes of the law, the two relationships, marriage and civil union, will be the same. Only the names will be different, and if the course of events in other states offers any guide, the courts will quickly recognize there is no difference in the law and mandate the term marriage.

We recognize the effort throughout our nation to question the very nature of marriage, and we encourage more dialogue to address this issue. Our Catholic faith speaks clearly to this issue: marriage is not just any relationship between human beings. Marriage has been established by our Creator in harmony with the nature of man and woman and with its own essential properties and purpose.

However, there is nothing specifically Catholic about this belief. The Church did not invent marriage and neither has any state. If both Church and state should disappear, marriage would retain its proper identity. No ideology can erase from the human spirit the certainty that marriage exists solely between a man and a woman, who by personal gift, proper and exclusive to themselves, mutually commit to and perfect each other in order to cooperate with God in the procreation and upbringing of new human lives.

Please also consider the impending clash between religious liberty and this legislation. A title declaring religious liberty does not suffice when the text of the underlying legislation undermines the principle. Illinois statute refers to the term "spouse" over 500 times, granting rights and benefits ranging from employment benefits to adoption. All of those instances will apply to parties to civil unions, and the full impact of these changes has not been fully discerned or discussed. How this legislation will impact Church operations from the adoption and foster care services of Catholic Charities to benefits afforded to employees are bona fide concerns.

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Perhaps of more significant concern is the continued weighting of individual rights over those of religious institutions.

Our laws and policies should support marriage as the foundation of this and every human society throughout time. Attempts to redefine marriage will only serve to weaken the already precarious position of American families. How can we pass on and protect the importance of marriage and the family if we do not recognize and promote in law its unique and irreplaceable nature?

In your arduous work as public servants, our prayers are always with you.

Thank you.

Francis Cardinal George

Archbishop of Chicago

+ Daniel R. Jenky

Bishop of Peoria

+ Thomas G. Wornat

Bishop of Rockford

+ Gerald K. Braxton

Bishop of Belleville

+ George J. Queen

Bishop of Springfield

+ Peter Sartain

Bishop of Joliet