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PRESS RELEASE

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The Catholic Conference of Illinois (CCI), on behalf of Cardinal Francis George, OMI, and all the Bishops of Illinois, call upon the Illinois General Assembly to reject Senate Bill 1716, the civil union legislation.

“Everyone has a right to marry, but no one has the right to change the nature of marriage. Marriage is what it is and always has been, no matter what a legislature decides to do; however, the public understanding of marriage will be negatively affected by passage of a bill that ignores the natural fact that sexual complementarity is at the core of marriage,” said Cardinal George. “Moreover, the impact of this legislation on the Church’s social service ministries remains an important and thus far unanswered concern. This important legislation is being put before a lame-duck General Assembly and more should be done to engage the people in public debate.”

Marriage was not invented by either the state or the Church, and neither can change its nature. However, laws structure society, and they influence patterns of behavior and thought. In our country, as in most others, marriage is granted unique protections and benefits under the law because marriage is the foundation of family and society. The proposed legislation would further weaken an already fragile institution.

There is an inherent conflict between this legislation and religious liberty. Language in the bill offers little protection in the context of litigation that religious institutions and individuals will face if this bill is adopted. With no explicit protections for religious liberties, it will not take long before the General Assembly or the courts:

- Mandate that faith-based institutions providing adoption or foster care services be required to place adoptive or foster children with couples who have entered into a same-sex civil union.
- Require that Catholic parishes or Catholic agencies providing social services (including retreats, religious camps, homeless shelters, senior care centers and community centers) be compelled to provide these services to individuals who are in a same-sex civil union.
- Refuse to protect small employers who do not wish to extend family benefits to employees in a same sex civil union.

The enactment of marriage-like benefits in civil union legislation will intensify the legal attack on marriage. It will not appease those who wish to redefine the institution of marriage. We need only look to California, Connecticut and other states where nearly identical legislation was passed. In every state where citizens have had the right to vote on marriage, they consistently express their support for marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

Senate Bill 1716 seeks to afford all the “legal obligations, responsibilities, protections, and benefits” of marriage to individuals in a civil union. There are literally hundreds of references to married “spouses” throughout Illinois’ law to which parties to a civil union will now be included. These references are not limited to hospital visitation rights (which are already afforded same sex couples via Presidential Executive Order) or property rights (which can be provided for through legal arrangements). They include benefits from the state Pension Code, the legal guardianship of children and other provisions that govern married life in Illinois.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that homosexuals “must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity.” Accordingly, we stand ready to work with the legislature and other agencies of state government to prevent unjust discrimination and to provide benefits to people judged by the civic authority as deserving – as long as such provision does not include the attempted redefinition of marriage as a union between one man and one woman for the sake of family.