



## United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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July 22, 2022

U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

As chairman of the Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, I am writing on the committee's behalf to express our concerns about H.R. 8404, the "Respect for Marriage Act." I urge you to oppose this bill should it be considered for a vote in the Senate.

It is not lost on us that this bill comes in apparent response to the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, which returned to the people the right to protect preborn children and their mothers from abortion.

It is unfortunate that Congress has not responded with a meaningful effort to help women in need with unexpected or difficult pregnancies. Rather, it is advancing an unnecessary bill to create a statutory right to same-sex civil marriage, which some claim is threatened by *Dobbs*, even though the Supreme Court's majority was explicit in its *Dobbs* holding that the decision had no bearing on the issue. There is also a question as to whether H.R. 8404 would grant federal recognition to civil marriages of more than two people performed in any state that would allow for them.

People who experience same-sex attraction should be treated with the same respect and compassion as anyone, on account of their human dignity, and never be subject to unjust discrimination. It was never discrimination, however, to simply maintain that an inherent aspect of the definition of marriage itself is the complementarity between the two sexes. Marriage as a lifelong, exclusive union of one man and one woman, and open to new life, is not just a religious ideal – it is, on the whole, what is best for society in a concrete sense, especially for children.

The health and socioeconomic benefits of stable family life with a mother and a father are well-established, as are the positive outcomes for children raised in such a home.<sup>1</sup> This corresponds with Pope Francis's recognizing children's right to a mother and a father.<sup>2</sup> Echoing this and responding to the Supreme Court's *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision in 2015, the USCCB

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<sup>1</sup> See, specifically with regard to same-sex couples, D. Paul Sullins, *Invisible Victims: Delayed Onset Depression among Adults with Same-Sex Parents*, *Depression Research and Treatment*, Vol. 2016 (2016); D. Paul Sullins, *Emotional Problems among Children with Same-Sex Parents: Difference by Definition*, *British Journal of Education, Society and Behavioural Science*, Vol. 7 No. 2, 99-120 (2015); Mark Regnerus, *How different are the adult children of parents who have same-sex relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study*, *Social Science Research*, Vol. 41 No. 4, 752-770 (2012).

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, colloquium on "The Complementarity of Man and Woman", Rome, 17 Nov. 2014; Pope Francis, Address to International Catholic Child Bureau (BICE), 11 Apr. 2014.

president at the time, Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, observed: “The law has a duty to support every child’s basic right to be raised, where possible, by his or her married mother and father in a stable home.” Same-sex civil marriage has further diminished the fulfillment of that right, both directly and indirectly as it further disassociates marriage and sexual actions from the responsibilities of childbearing. This, in turn, reinforces existing negative phenomena in our society that have already done so much damage, such as fatherlessness.<sup>3</sup>

Advocates for marriage redefinition claimed it was a matter of “live and let live.” Yet governments continue to use marriage redefinition laws to threaten the conscience and religious freedom of individuals such as wedding vendors, and entities such as foster care and other social service providers, who seek to serve their communities without being punished for their long-standing and well-founded beliefs. This bill would lend weight to those efforts and further marginalize millions of “reasonable and sincere people.”<sup>4</sup>

The “Respect for Marriage Act,” would do the opposite of what its name implies, codifying a demand for states and the federal government to honor whatever may be deemed “marriage” by any other state. The concern that the bill could require federal recognition of “marriages” of more than two persons is not far-fetched, as at least three cities in Massachusetts have already legally enshrined so-called polyamorous domestic partnerships. By making federal recognition of such relationships automatic upon their recognition by any state, the bill would create a massive incentive for radical activists to concentrate their efforts in a single state – further lending plausibility to this potentially disastrous scenario. For all of these reasons, I must urge you to vote “no” on this measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to articulate our concerns in light of the teachings of the Catholic Church and considerations for the common good. I pray for you as we all work together toward a more just society where families are well supported and empowered to welcome all children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Salvatore J. Cordileone". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Rev. Salvatore J. Cordileone  
Archbishop of San Francisco  
Chairman, Committee on Laity, Marriage,  
Family Life and Youth

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<sup>3</sup> See generally Helen M. Alvaré, “Putting Children’s Interests First in U.S. Family Law and Policy,” Cambridge University Press, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. 644, 657 (2015)