

January 17, 2005

## Testimony in opposition to HB 259

Mme. Chair, Members of the Committee:

My name is Eric Schiedermayer. I represent the Montana Catholic Conference, the voice for Montana's Roman Catholic bishops in the state legislature, and I rise in opposition to this bill.

In every way, the civil unions proposed by this bill describe a counterfeit marriage and are contrary to the will of the Montana voters which was so clearly expressed in last November's Constitutional Initiative 96 stating that only marriage between a man and a woman shall be valid in this state. Of all the gay rights bills before the Montana legislature this session, this one would cause the greatest harm if enacted.

As I have stated in previous testimony before this committee regarding House Bill 240, the Catholic Church believes that human dignity and human rights are God-given – intrinsic to every human person regardless of circumstances. We do not hate persons who engage in homosexual behavior, but we will continue to reject such behavior as destructive to both those who engage in it and to society as a whole.

Because heterosexual married couples ensure the succession of generations, they are eminently within the public interest. As a result, our law grants them institutional recognition and protection. Homosexual unions, on the other hand, do not exercise this function for the common good, and do not merit the same recognition or protection. In fact, legal recognition of homosexual unions will obscure certain basic moral values and cause a devaluation of the institution of marriage.

A recent Vatican document, copies of which I will distribute to this committee, states that, "Respect for homosexual persons cannot lead in any way to approval of homosexual behavior or to legal recognition of homosexual unions. The common good requires that laws recognize, promote and protect marriage as the basis of the family, the primary unit of society. Legal recognition of homosexual unions or placing them on the same level as marriage would mean not only the approval of deviant behavior, with the consequence of making it a model in present-day society, but would also obscure basic values which belong to the common inheritance of humanity."

The document goes on to say that "Not even in a remotely analogous sense do homosexual unions fulfill the purpose for which marriage and family deserve specific categorical recognition. On the contrary, there are good reasons for holding that such unions are harmful to the proper development of human society."

In conclusion, the sanctity of marriage and family, and the freedom of parents to rear their children in a healthy and moral climate are critical to a well ordered society. All of these are under assault today. It is incumbent upon us to strengthen and support them, not to undermine them. Legislation must not make homosexual behavior or lifestyle a protected or approved activity. We urge you to reject this bill.

Respectfully submitted,



Eric Schiedermayer

Executive Director, Montana Catholic Conference