



Testimony

**SB 5336 - Protecting individuals in domestic partnerships by granting certain rights and benefits.
Senate Committee on Government Operations & Elections
January 25, 2007**

Senator Fairley and members of the Committee, my name is Bishop Joseph Tyson. I am here today representing the five Catholic bishops of Washington State who together form the Washington State Catholic Conference. I'm grateful to you for your time today.

The Washington State Catholic Conference is taking a keen interest in SB 5336. The title suggests that this bill "protects individuals in domestic partnerships by granting certain rights and benefits."

It may in fact do this, but it also unjustly discriminates against a wide swath of peoples in our state. This bill grants to "domestic partners" a packaged set of rights it fails to grant to the many other kinds of relationships that exist beyond the state's legal definition of marriage.

The Washington State Catholic Conference supports the benefits offered by this bill but we ask that the bill be amended to extend the benefits to other adults.

As a Church, we uphold the dignity of the human person. Washington State's definition of marriage between a man and a woman supports a wide web of social relationships that includes not only the immediate spouses but children and extended family.

Yet this wider web of social need is ignored by this bill. In fact, a great variety of bonded relationships and various households exist outside of civil marriage. Especially in our immigrant communities, multi-generational households can include not only children and grandparents, but cousins, uncles and aunts. Sharing the same housing, these blood relationships often face the same difficult decisions regarding visitation, healthcare treatment and insurance coverage as those addressed in this bill.

Indeed over one half million residents here in Washington State lack health care benefits. Many are from our racially diverse, low income, immigrant or multi-language households. I ask you to consider these questions: Shouldn't they be entitled to the same packaging of benefits proposed for same-sex couples? Shouldn't they be able to designate a beneficiary if they are working but their sibling is at home caring for an ailing relative? Shouldn't they be entitled to ease in hospital visitation and support of their loved ones?

As it stands, SB 5336 is too narrow in its focus. This bill simultaneously ignores the plight of the widest number of people in need of packaged benefits here in Washington State and erodes our state's understanding for the one support they do have – namely the sanctity of marriage and the glue of social support families can be in times of dire need. While this bill focuses on benefits for domestic partnerships we know that there are many who want to change the State's definition of marriage and, consequently undermine the one source of social and civil stability in many people's lives.

We urge you to include everyone in this bill. Make the language inclusive of the many kinds of relationships deserving of social support and eliminate the exclusive "same-sex union" and "domestic partner" wording found in this bill. Please consider the vast number of people not included in the benefits of this bill and their plight too.

Finally, on behalf of the Washington State Catholic Conference, I want to thank you for your time today and the service you are to the people of Washington State every day.