



Testimony
HB 2516 – Redefining Marriage
House Judiciary Committee
January 23, 2012

Representative Pedersen and members of the Committee, my name is J. Peter Sartain. I am the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Seattle and president of the Washington State Catholic Conference, which represents the Catholic Bishops of Washington State on issues of public policy. Thank you for allowing me to offer this testimony. Today the Catholic Conference respectfully urges you to oppose the passage of HB 2516.

I come before you this afternoon as a pastor. I have been a priest for almost 34 years, and in those years I have ministered to people from a wide range of backgrounds, ways of life and cultures. Our Church teaches that all persons are loved by God and have God-given dignity. We all recognize that the bill before this committee has elicited strong emotions on both sides. I have tried my best to treat all with respect, compassion, and sensitivity, as my Church teaches and expects me and all Catholics to do. My brother bishops and I hope that our voice contributes significantly to the discussion of a matter that has serious long-range implications for our state and society at large.

Our opposition to HB 2516 is based on the grave challenge this legislation poses to the common good. By attempting to redefine marriage, it ignores the origin, purpose and value of marriage to individuals, families and society. We recognize that not everyone holds our faith and beliefs, but the universal principles that form the basis for our position are readily discernible by all people. They transcend any particular society, government, or religious community; in fact, they are built into human life itself. The natural structure of human sexuality orders the transmission of human life through man and woman. Because only the union of a man and woman can generate new life, no other human relationship is its equivalent.

Because of its essential and irreplaceable contribution to the common good, marriage is correctly defined by the state as the union of a man and a woman as husband and wife. The state has long recognized the societal benefit of promoting strong families, because they establish a framework for healthy, permanent and faithful male-female relationships and thus establish the best conditions for rearing children; moreover, strong families help ensure a strong, stable civic community. The state has thus long understood that it has a compelling interest in recognizing and supporting these mothers and fathers through a distinct category of laws. Were the definition of marriage to change, there would be no special laws to support and recognize the irreplaceable contribution that these married couples make to society and to the common good by bringing to life the next generation.

In conclusion, as the foundation of the family, marriage between a man and a woman is the basic unit of society, a personal relationship with public significance. Marriage makes a contribution to the common good of society unlike any other relationship, through the procreation, rearing and education of children. Moreover, the union of a man and woman in marriage lived well over a lifetime is an incomparable good for husbands and wives, their children and extended families, civic communities and all of society. Marriage is a vocation and a gift to be cherished, supported, upheld, and protected.

I urge you to uphold the definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman. Thank you.