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The Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Protection Act

What does this bill do?

This bill is very simple – it expands civil marriage to same-sex couples. This means that county clerks could issue marriage licenses to all qualified couples regardless of their gender.

What is the difference between civil marriage and religious marriage?

Civil marriage is a relationship licensed by the state. It does not require the blessing of any religious institution. Religious marriage is the spiritual blessing of a relationship by a church, mosque, synagogue or other religious institution. A religious marriage is not legally binding on the married couple unless they also secure a state marriage license. Currently, no religious institution can be required to marry two people, even if their marriage is licensed by Maryland. This bill reinforces this is right of religious institutions.

Marriage provides protections and responsibilities

The denial of marriage licenses to same-sex couples in Maryland means the denial of vital protections that many different-sex couples take for granted. These basic protections include decision-making rights in a medical emergency, basic property ownership rights and inheritance rights. The easiest way to remedy this discrimination is to expand the marriage laws of Maryland to include same-sex couples.

Marriage protects children and families

Marriage protects children by providing an economic safety net to their families, and to the kids themselves. All children deserve the right to health coverage, social security, emergency care and inheritance rights, no matter who their parents are.

Will this bill compel religions or clergy to marry or recognizes marriage of same-sex couples?

No. The bill explicitly states that “no officials of a religious institution or body authorized to solemnize marriages shall be required to solemnize any marriage in violation of the right to free exercise of religion guaranteed by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution and by the Maryland Constitution and Maryland Declaration of Rights.”

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