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**BISHOPS' STATEMENT ON MARRIAGE AMENDMENT**

DATE: June 30, 2006

As citizens, we, the Roman Catholic Bishops in Massachusetts, support the constitutional amendment on marriage that voters last fall petitioned the state legislature to consider. The Secretary of State certified a record number of signatures from registered voters asking to put the amendment on the 2008 ballot. The debate over the meaning of marriage should not be limited to government officials since the magnitude of the issue calls for the full participation of the public. Neither the judiciary nor the legislature should substitute itself for the sovereignty of the people, especially on such a foundational matter as the meaning of marriage for the common good of society.

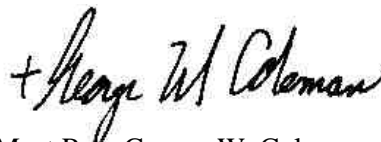
There are those who seek to relegate our position on marriage to the religious sphere. While we address the public debate about marriage as bishops, we do not seek the translation of our religious convictions into public policy. Rather, we have proposed a position based on universally accessible moral reasoning about the content of law and policy in the Commonwealth. Our position, widely shared among secular governments and cultures, can be examined on the basis of rational analysis. We speak out on this issue motivated by our desire to promote the common good and in support of married couples and their families.

The proposed addition to our state constitution, prospectively defining marriage as the union between one man and one woman, is not extreme, bigoted or religiously sectarian. It reflects the deeply rooted consensus in our society about what marriage is, a consensus rejected by a one-vote majority of our state supreme court without the people's input. This consensus is based on natural law and common sense. Neither the state nor religions invented marriage or determined its natural components. Instead they institutionalized a reality that existed well before them to further the common good. In our society every person has the civil right to marry, but no person should have the right to tailor the institution of marriage to his or her personal wants. An exaggerated sense of entitlement is eroding the right of society to have a strong institution of marriage.

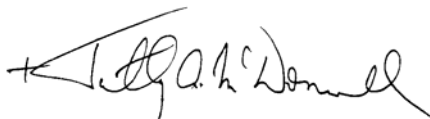
For these reasons, we urge the legislature to give the approval necessary this year for moving forward the citizen-initiated marriage amendment, so that the people ultimately can exercise their right to vote on such a crucial social and moral issue in 2008.



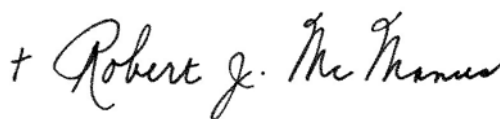
Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley  
Archdiocese of Boston



Most Rev. George W. Coleman  
Diocese of Fall River



Most Rev. Timothy A. McDonnell  
Diocese of Springfield



Most Rev. Robert J. McManus  
Diocese of Worcester