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**INFORMATION AND NEWS RELEASE**

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Archbishop Sean P. O'Malley, O.F.M. Cap., of the Archdiocese of Boston, has issued the following statement regarding proposals before tomorrow's joint session of the Massachusetts legislature to link the reaffirmation of marriage as the union between one man and one woman with a mandate to create same-sex civil unions equal to marriage:

As the legislature prepares to re-convene the constitutional convention tomorrow, I renew my call to the Catholic faithful to pray and to work together on behalf of the proposed constitutional amendment defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman. We must do so with courage and with charity.

Our stand for the defense of marriage is motivated by a deep conviction concerning the common good of all citizens. We uphold marriage as a unique bond between a wife and a husband, a bond which is the bedrock and foundation of our families and society. Marriage is given special protections and benefits in law because it is the institution which best provides for the procreation and the raising of children. Our legislators must protect the unique benefit to society that the marital bond creates and the good that this bond produces for children.

We support the Marriage Affirmation and Protection Amendment as it has been presented, without the introduction of civil unions language. The amendment seeks to protect a social institution that is essential to our society. A debate about social benefits given to other individuals in our law is a separate issue.

We are concerned with proposals to give same-sex couples identical benefits and protections to those given to husbands and wives that pose a grave threat to religious liberty and the freedom of conscience. Whether the name used is same-sex marriage or civil unions, an equal treatment requirement in the constitution may be used to coerce private and public entities to adopt practices that would violate their values and understanding of the family and social justice.

Adding language to create a constitutional exemption based on conscience will not solve the problem. The threat to the common good will remain.

The amendment reaffirming marriage as the union between one man and one woman must be approved on its own merits. Joining this amendment to the issue of civil unions deprives the people an opportunity to express their views on marriage. Citizens have that right. Linking the two coerces people in a way that is unfair. Voting on them separately respects the will of the public.

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