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**BISHOPS' STATEMENT ON MARRIAGE AMENDMENT**

DATE: June 16, 2005

We support the citizen-led effort to gather signatures for a new initiative petition that would add the following language to the Massachusetts Constitution:

When recognizing marriages entered after the adoption of this amendment by the people, the Commonwealth and its political subdivisions shall define marriage as only the union of one man and one woman.

This proposed amendment restores to our laws the traditional definition of marriage. To remain effective as society's primary institution for ensuring the well-being of children, marriage must be understood by government as a commitment involving one man and one woman.

The amendment addresses only the meaning of marriage itself and affects only future marriages. It takes no position on how the legislature should assign legal rights and economic benefits. Thus, if placed on the statewide ballot in 2008, it gives the people a clear choice on marriage.

We oppose another amendment, initially approved by the legislature in 2004, which combines the issues of marriage and same-sex civil unions. This proposal fails to provide a clear choice—it dictates that civil unions shall be treated as marriage in all but name. Protecting marriage is more than preserving a name. The people deserve the opportunity to vote on marriage as a stand-alone issue.

Thus, we encourage all Catholics to exercise their civil right to participate in the signature drive for the new initiative petition. When the time comes in the fall, signatures may be gathered outside Catholic churches with the cooperation of pastors. We remind supporters to conduct their campaign in a spirit of respect for all persons.



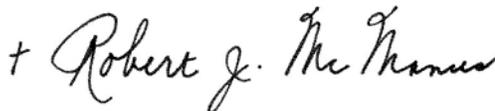
Most Rev. Seán P. O'Malley  
Archbishop, Archdiocese of Boston



Most Rev. George W. Coleman  
Bishop, Diocese of Fall River



Most Rev. Timothy A. McDonnell  
Bishop, Diocese of Springfield



Most Rev. Robert J. McManus  
Bishop, Diocese of Worcester