



March 30, 2016

Rep. Gabrielle LeDoux  
State Capitol, Room 118  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear Representative LeDoux:

Thank you for agreeing to hear HB 236, *An Act Relating to Marriage Solemnization* in your committee. We appreciate the opportunity to testify on this very important piece of legislation.

As pastors, we have watched as our religious liberties have eroded over the last several years on a nationwide level. As you know, our United States Constitution ensures all people to freely practice their religious beliefs according to the tenets of their individual faith traditions. As leaders of the Roman Catholic Church in Alaska, we are grateful that Rep. Talerico and Senator Miccichi introduced this legislation to clarify and codify our rights here in Alaska.

From our perspective, the bill you have before you is important on several fronts. First, it ensures that neither we nor our priests or deacons Statewide would be required to solemnize a same sex marriage. Our Catholic faith tradition clearly professes that marriage is defined as between one man and one woman. While it is doubtful that a same sex couple would present themselves to one of our pastors and ask him to solemnize their marriage, this legislation would uphold our religious liberties.

Our second reason for supporting this bill is based on the assurances that we would not be required to allow parish or church facilities to be used for services or events that would be tied to a union that we do not recognize.

Here in Juneau, many of you may be familiar with the Shrine of St. Therese. St. Therese is the patron saint of Alaska. In 1938, a little stone chapel was built in her honor 22 miles North of here. Two previous bishops of the

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Diocese of Juneau, Bishop Cremont and Bishop Kenny are buried directly under the altar of this sacred space. Over the last 75 years we have welcomed guests from all over the world. Because of the unique surroundings and the simple beauty of this small chapel, many weddings have occurred here. In the past we have allowed all faith traditions to use the chapel. Now, we limit it strictly to Catholic weddings between one man and one woman. Passage of this legislation would ensure we could maintain our current practice.


In the Archdiocese of Anchorage, we have a mission parish in Girdwood, Our Our Lady of the Snows. This chapel has been marketed through Alyeska Hotel as a "destination wedding" location. A clause in the contract that the Archdiocese has with the hotel states that marriages or use of the facility may not conflict with Catholic church teaching. This legislation would ensure that clause would remain true to our church teaching and that the chapel would be used for couples who support our definition of marriage.

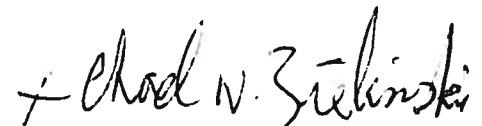
In the Diocese of Fairbanks, we have Immaculate Conception Church on the banks of the Chena River. The distinctive white buildings with it tapering bell tower and statue of our Holy Mother Mary is on the National Historical Register. It attracts interest from Catholic and non-Catholics alike as a venue for marriage ceremonies. This bill would provide peace of mind should we need to decline enquiries from inappropriate parties.

We urge you to support this important piece of legislation that will ensure our religious liberties will be maintained.

Sincerely,

  
+ Roger L. Schwietz, OMI  
Archdiocese of Anchorage

  
Edward J. Burns  
Diocese of Juneau

  
Chad W. Zielinski  
Diocese of Fairbanks

CC: House Judiciary  
Rep. David Talerico  
Senator Peter Miccichi