

# Bishop Barron disappointed by Senate passage of Respect for Marriage Act

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Catholic News Service

Catholic Spirit  
Dec 8, 2022  
p 7

The chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth said he was "gravely disappointed" by the U.S. Senate's passage of the Respect for Marriage Act.

Bishop Robert Barron of Winona-Rochester said Dec. 1 that the measure "fails to include clear, comprehensive and affirmative conscience protections for religious organizations and individuals who uphold the sanctity of traditional marriage that are needed."

The Senate passed the bill Nov. 29 in a 61-36 vote. The U.S. House of Representatives approved the measure in July, but must vote again on the bill as amended by the Senate. House passage is expected, and President Joe Biden has said he will sign the bill into law.

Decades of social and legal developments "have torn sexuality, childbearing, and marriage from each other in the public consciousness," Bishop Barron said in a statement released by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

"Much of society has lost sight of the purpose of marriage and now equates it with adults' companionship," he said.

"We affirm our respect for the dignity of all engaged in this debate and acknowledge differing perspectives in our civil society," Bishop Barron added, "but the impact of this bill will only contribute to the diminishment of the sacredness and integrity of marriage in our society."

Ahead of the Senate vote, Bishop Barron joined Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York, chairman of the USCCB's Committee for Religious Liberty, in reiterating the bishops' "firm opposition" to the "misnamed" measure legalizing same-sex marriage.

In a Nov. 23 joint letter to all members



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New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan, left, and Bishop Robert Barron of Winona-Rochester.

of Congress, the chairmen said they were writing "to implore Congress to reverse course" on H.R. 8404, also known as RMA. The letter said the bishops' opposition to the Respect for Marriage Act "by no means condones any hostility toward anyone who experiences same-sex attraction."

"Catholic teaching on marriage is inseparable from Catholic teaching on the inherent dignity and worth of every human being. To attack one is to attack the other. Congress must have the courage to defend both," the letter said.

The bill codifies the Supreme Court's 2015 ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that found a constitutional right to same-sex marriage. It also codifies interracial marriage. In a Nov. 17 statement after the bill advanced in the Senate, Cardinal Dolan called it "a bad deal for the many courageous Americans of faith and no faith who continue to believe and uphold the truth about marriage in the public square today."

The text of their joint letter and a lengthy detailed analysis by the USCCB on how the bill, if it becomes law, could

endanger religious liberty can be found at [bit.ly/3H22Z74](http://bit.ly/3H22Z74).

"First, the bill will be used to argue that the government has a compelling interest in forcing religious organizations and individuals to treat same-sex civil marriages as valid," the analysis said.

An amendment to the bill says it "protects all religious liberty and conscience protections available under the Constitution or federal law, including but not limited to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, and prevents this bill from being used to diminish or repeal any such protection."

It also "confirms that nonprofit religious organizations will not be required to provide any services, facilities, or goods for the solemnization or celebration of a marriage."

The amendment was worked out by a bipartisan group of negotiators — headed by Sens. Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis., and Susan Collins, R-Maine — who had asked the Senate for more time to consider "an amendment designed to respond to the concerns of GOP lawmakers who feared

the legislation could put churches and other religious institutions at legal risk — if Congress voted to codify same-sex marriage rights." With the amendment, 12 Republicans joined every Democrat in supporting the marriage bill.

But the USCCB analysis said that even with the amendment, under the bill "religious objectors are likelier to be denied exemptions under the First Amendment and RFRA in cases where they would have prevailed but for the passage of RMA." The measure "would have a ripple effect that hurts religious freedom in every context where conflicts with same-sex marriage arise, not just in the context of compliance with RMA itself," the analysis said.

"Employment decisions, employees' spousal benefits, eligibility for grants or contracts, accreditation, tax exemptions — it runs the full gamut, even in religious liberty conflicts arising out of state or local laws," it added.

"Unfortunately, a number of religious groups and senators are asserting that the amended text of RMA sufficiently protects religious freedom," Cardinal Dolan and Bishop Barron said in their letter. They added that from the perspective of the USCCB, "whose bishops' ministries comprise the largest nongovernmental provider of social services" in the U.S., the provisions of the bill "that relate to religious liberty are insufficient."

"The amended act will put the ministries of the Catholic Church, people of faith and other Americans who uphold a traditional meaning of marriage at greater risk of government discrimination," the two prelates said.

"This bill is needless and harmful and must be voted down," they said. "At the same time, Congress, and our nation as a whole, must resolve to foster a culture where every individual, as a child of God, is treated with respect and compassion."