



DIOCESE OF ARLINGTON · DIOCESE OF RICHMOND
Representing the Virginia Catholic Bishops in Public Policy Matters

March 23, 2017

Bishop Michael Burbidge & Bishop Francis DiLorenzo Statement on Governor's Veto of Bill Defending Right of Religious Organizations to Practice Faith

For the second straight year, Governor McAuliffe has vetoed legislation that would have protected clergy and religious organizations from being punished by the state because they follow the deeply held teachings of their faith. The governor's veto of SB 1324 and HB 2025 ignores Virginia's long tradition of upholding the religious freedom of faith communities which dates back to Thomas Jefferson. It turns a blind eye to the great impact of these organizations that serve Virginians every day. The bill merely sought to preserve fair access to public resources – like tax exempt status, contracts, grants and licensure – for religious charities and schools that hold to their longstanding belief that marriage is between a man and a woman.

The governor said the legislation was “another attempt to stigmatize” – when in fact vetoing the legislation did just that by sidelining religious entities that hold to their deeply held religious beliefs. Acting on our behalf and our belief that all people have inherent dignity and are deserving of respect, the Virginia Catholic Conference defended the religious freedom of [Catholic organizations](#) that are lifelines to the Virginia communities they serve. They employ nearly 25,000 people, educate over 30,000 students, and provide hundreds of millions of dollars in services to the homeless, elderly, sick, uninsured, refugees, immigrants and children in need of foster care in every corner of Virginia.

Just as serving the most vulnerable is inherent to our Catholic faith, so is our understanding about the nature of marriage. We cannot sever one from the other. We are dismayed that with this veto the Governor fails to recognize the right of these organizations to profess and practice their faith.

We will continue to stand for Virginia's long tradition of upholding the religious freedom of faith communities. Tolerance of and respect for religious beliefs makes our Commonwealth strong and our communities even stronger. We would also like to thank SB 1324 patron Senator Bill Carrico and HB 2025 patron Delegate Nicholas Freitas for defending these values with passion, persistence and eloquence throughout the 2017 Virginia General Assembly session.

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