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Colorado governor signs bill to legalize same-sex civil unions

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Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper on Thursday signed into law a civil unions bill for same-sex couples that Denver Archbishop Samuel Aquila said "harms families, civil liberties and the natural rights of all Colorado's children."

The measure was approved by the state House March 12 and went to Hickenlooper for his signature. The Senate had passed it in February. The new law takes effect May 1 and gives same-sex couples many of the rights and responsibilities of marriage.

"(It) is the beginning of an effort to redefine the family in Colorado and to undermine the right of all children to have a mother and a father. Civil unions are not about equality, tolerance or fairness," the archbishop said.

"They create an alternate reality in which all institutions can be self-defined. Make no mistake: Civil unions are the first step to redefining marriage and to radically redefining the concept of civil rights," he said in a statement released when the House passed the bill.

"Civil rights are about protecting individuals and institutions from tyranny or oppression, not providing legal endorsement to all conceivable social arrangements and constructs," he said.

Catholic Charities of the Denver archdiocese also criticized the measure as it moved through the Legislature because it contains no religious liberty protections for agencies morally opposed to placing children for adoption with same-sex couples.

The new law states that "a priest, minister, rabbi, or other official of a religious institution or denomination or an Indian nation or tribe is not required to certify a civil union in violation of his or her right to free exercise of religion." But there is no such religious freedom provision for adoption agencies.

"The church recognizes and affirms the dignity of every human person -- but she does not see all relationships as equal," Aquila said in his statement. "Marriage is a unique social relationship between a man and a woman which exists for the good of children and as the foundation of all human communities."

He said marriage "has been uniquely protected in law for millennia" to preserve the foundations of a stable society.

He also called what is now a law "particularly troubling because the religious liberty of all Coloradans has been discarded under the guise of equality."

"The ability for religious-based institutions to provide foster care and adoption services for Colorado's children is now dangerously imperiled," Aquila said.

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