

Adoption bill draws intense debate in state Legislature

By Bill Howard - The Colorado Catholic Herald

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE OF CATHOLIC LIFE

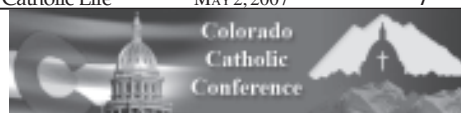
DENVER. A bill that would allow for the adoption of children by any two adults, including same-sex couples and common-law spouses, cruised to a vote by the Senate Committee of the Whole despite heavy opposition during public testimony.

The Senate State, Veterans & Military Affairs Committee voted 3-2 along party lines to move the bill, sponsored by Sen. Jennifer Veiga, D-Denver, and Rep. Alice Madden, D-Boulder, closer to Gov. Bill Ritter's desk.

Opponents testifying against the bill outnumbered supporters 9-2 and included The Colorado Catholic Conference, Catholic Charities of Colorado Springs adoption services and the Colorado Association of Family and Children's Agencies.

Opposition was split between a lack of legal safeguards for children to prevent the child from being treated as property between two adults and also on the bill's allowance of a same-sex partner to become the second legal guardian of an adopted child. While the bill did not force religious-based agencies to allow same-sex couples to adopt from them, opponents still saw HB 1330 as a step toward the state acknowledging that same-sex unions are as legitimate as heterosexual marriage.

"House Bill 1330 will indirectly weaken society's classical understanding of family and marriage, which is the lifelong love of one man and one woman," Jenny Kraska, Colorado Catholic Conference deputy director for government affairs, said during her testimony. "House Bill 1330 seeks to circumvent the clearly ex-



pressed will of Colorado voters who clearly rejected Referendum in November of 2006. Referendum I would have allowed same-sex domestic partnerships to be a parallel legal structure to traditional marriage and would have afforded same-sex couples the possibility of adopting children."

Testifying on behalf of Catholic Charities of Colorado Springs' adoption services, Susan Rezzonico expressed concern over "the legal process for addressing disputes between the sole legal parent and the second parent regarding the child."

"Catholic Charities was hopeful that this bill would address the issue of kinship adoption in a meaningful manner, but instead this bill would potentially cause birth parents and the second-parent relative to face adversarial situations where the best interest of the child would be lost," said Rezzonico, director of the diocesan Office of Social Concerns and Public Policy. "Adoption of a child is a serious undertaking, and any legislation that is developed . . . must take into consideration the many legal aspects and consequences that would be involved if such relationships become contentious or are dissolved."

Supporters believe the bill will provide a broader financial safety net for children. In her closing statement, Sen. Veiga said the bill "is not creating any new rite of adoption for an agency. What we're trying to do is protect children that are already in the home of one legal parent, and we're simply trying to have the law recognize that these families exist."

"Whether you come at it from a religious perspective or any other perspective, frankly, (that doesn't) want to do anything to encourage homosexual couples from having children . . . they're already out there," she continued. "All we're doing is recognizing the existence of these families and asking, 'What can we do as a society to make sure those kids are protected legally?'"

Sen. Dave Schultheis, R-Colorado Springs, responded that the bill is "a threat to the voters of Colorado" who overwhelmingly voted against Referendum I last November. Sen. Schultheis said he received 621 non-duplicate e-mails opposed to HB1330 and 30 in support.

"The bill is not about children, in my view," he said. "It's about furthering the homosexual agenda and attempting to narrow the gap between marriage and the concept of homosexual unions so that someday a liberal judge can rule that there is no difference between civil unions and marriage and therefore move in that direction."

CCC head makes newspaper's 'Top 50' list

By John Gleason, DCR

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE OF CATHOLIC LIFE

DENVER- The Colorado Statesman, a newspaper that focuses on state politics, has released its annual Top 50 of the Future list and Tim Dore, executive director of the Colorado Catholic Conference, is on the list.

The Top 50 of the Future is a list of local movers and shakers selected by the newspaper's editorial staff from hundreds of nominations. Editor Jody Strogoff said narrowing the field down from the initial group of nominees is a lengthy process.

"We're looking for people we see as emerging leaders; the next generation to guide the state of Colorado," she said.

Strogoff said that Dore was selected in part because he is a real player at the Colorado Legislature.

"He spends a lot of his time shuffling through a lot of legislation for the Church as well as lobbying for them," she said. "He's a stand-up guy."

"Even though this is an honor, it is also a testimony to the others who work at the conference and the work they have done. It's gratifying to know that the conference is successful about getting the word out about issues important to Catholics," he said, citing House Bill 1300, which would have eliminated the need for students to have written parental consent to attend sex education classes. Catholics were encouraged to contact their representatives and voice their opposition to it and responded. As a result, faced with little chance of passing, HB 1300 was recently laid over until later in the session, effectively killing it.

"That shows that our system is working the way it's supposed to," he said. "We elect people to represent us and they need to hear from us on matters of concern. When they do, they respond."



Tim Dore

Catholics urged to speak out against HB 1292

Sex ed bill mandating science-based content moves forward

By John Gleason, Denver Catholic Register

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE OF CATHOLIC LIFE

DENVER- A bill that would mandate the adoption of science-based content standards for instruction regarding human sexuality in school districts, family resource centers and teen pregnancy prevention programs was passed by the Senate Education Committee by a vote of 4-3 on March 29. House Bill 1292, sponsored by Sen. Sue Windels, D-Arvida, and Rep. Nancy Todd, D-Aurora, now moves on to be debated by the Senate.

Most of the support for HB 1292, which would diminish the authority of local school districts if passed, comes from Planned Parenthood, which holds that any teaching of human sexuality must include science-based content and information on contraception.

Also testifying in favor of the bill was Susan Dreisbach, president of the board of directors of Colorado Organization on Adolescent, Pregnancy, Parenting and Prevention.

"It's a need for our youth," Dreisbach said of science-based teaching. "We need age-appropriate programs."

The Colorado Catholic Conference, the state level, public policy arm of the Church in Colorado, has expressed concern about the legislation, particularly its possible negative effects on groups that receive Title V funding and only teach abstinence.

Jennifer Kraska, deputy director for government affairs for the conference, said that if HB 1292 passes any group that currently teaches abstinence only would no longer be able to go into public schools because of the curriculum that is being mandated by the bill.

"Our concern with this bill is that people understand exactly what it will do," Kraska said. "Our other big concern is that this should be a local control issue. Right now, school districts and school boards determine what values and standards they would like to see set when it comes to human sexuality education and content standards. Our belief is that it should be kept there."

In testimony before the committee, Kraska said that to the best of the knowledge of the Colorado Catholic Conference, there was no public outcry for this type of legislation. She urged the committee to oppose the bill.

Even though HB 1292 passed, Kraska said she was impressed with the many people against the bill who turned out for the hearing. Before the hearing was called to order, the committee first had to be relocated to a larger room to accommodate all those who wanted to attend.

"People are really upset about this; I wasn't surprised," Kraska said. "We've gotten a lot of response from the action alert we sent out and I would urge all Catholics to call their legislators and ask them to oppose this bill."

Amended SB 124 redefines 'family,' goes to governor's office

By Bill Howard - The Colorado Catholic Herald

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE OF CATHOLIC LIFE

The focus of a bill that was intended to widen the range of low and moderate-income people who could receive financial assistance from the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority (CHAFA) has shifted to the bill's definition of a "family."

During the amendment process for Senate Bill 124, the phrase "whether or not" was inserted into the definition, stating that a family "means two or more persons, whether or not related by blood, marriage or adoption, who live or expect to live together as a single household in the same home, a single person who is either at least 62 years of age or has a disability, or such other single persons as the board may by rule determine to be eligible for assistance."

When SB 124 was up for debate on the House floor on March 28, opponents argued against the bill for two reasons: because the redefinition of "family" goes against what was implied in Amendment 43, in which Colorado voters last November approved a definition of marriage of one man and woman, and because it would widen the risk factor for CHAFA in distributing loans that won't be paid back.

The redefinition of "family" occurred earlier in the House reading process, and opponents tried to get the bill sent back to a committee discussion so as to remove the "whether or not" language.

Supporters said they were merely updating the bill to include a definition of "family" that is already supported in federal housing law.

A search by the Colorado Catholic Conference, the Colorado bishops' legislative arm, could not find such a definition.

"There is no language in federal housing law as broad as the proposed language in Colorado regarding the definition of family," Jenny Kraska, CCC deputy director for government affairs.

"The commendable purpose of Senate Bill 124 is to clarify and revise the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority Act," Kraska said.

"The (CCC) supports the goals of the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority, but the conference has concerns with the definition of the term 'family' that is used in Senate Bill 124. The definition of 'family' is overly broad and could have unintended consequences for future legislation in Colorado."

In a last-ditch effort to delay the bill's passing to Gov. Bill Ritter's desk, Rep. Kevin Lundberg, R-Larimer, pleaded with his colleagues that, by allowing "whether

or not" in the definition, we're "heading down the wrong road." He said he could not find this redefinition of the "family" in federal law.

"I have a significant problem with the taking the word 'family' and twisting it in such a convoluted fashion so that it means anything you want it to mean," Lundberg said. "This is improper in Colorado statute. It has no place whatsoever, and for Senate Bill 124 to go down this road is very improper and completely inappropriate."

Lundberg said that, when Colorado voters approved Amendment 43, they were also defining the family. "It's a relationship by blood, adoption, marriage . . . that's what's understood to be a family," he said. "Now we're saying 'whether or not,' (so) anything goes."

House Majority Leader Alice Madden, D-Boulder, retorted that Lundberg did not "live in the real world." "I'm just really sad that good legislation is going to be hijacked every time this comes up, apparently," she said. "I think we should vote in the real world. It's just sad to me that we're going to have this discussion, that you're going to be willing to hurt other people because there are other people you do not approve of." Lundberg replied that he urged a "no" vote, "not to throw this bill away, but to get it right. We have time in this session to get it right, and frankly it saddens me deeply that every opportunity we have to redefine the family, we do it, even in legislation where it shouldn't be at all."

Rep. Bob Gardner, R-El Paso, echoed Lundberg, adding that he is "heartbroken that a good bill . . . would be hijacked for what I can only surmise is an agenda."

Steering away from the debate over the "family" definition amendment, Rep. Bill Cadman, R-El Paso, said he would not support the bill, claiming that the risk base for loans will become so broad that "four people who happen to be renting apartments in the same building can say, 'Let's go to CHAFA (and borrow money) even though we have no connection to each other under any definition as it is being redefined here.'"

"It's not about living in the real world or how you feel about relationships," he said. "The only reason CHAFA stays in business is because they get paid back. And they have to be able to make discerning decisions on where to lend that money and hopefully get that money back so they can continue to lend it to other people who are challenged and can't get funding through conventional methods."

Another amendment removed the trademark name "Jacuzzi" and replaced it with "hot tub." The amendment did not give opponents another chance to debate the bill, which passed and went to Gov. Ritter's office.