



January 18, 2006 - Letter Archbishop O'Malley has sent to parishes regarding Senate Bill 1074

My dear friends in Christ,

The Archdiocese of Boston and all religious denominations in Massachusetts are facing a major challenge. Senate Bill 1074 "An Act Relative to Charities in Massachusetts", if passed, will greatly burden all churches, including the Catholic Church and all of the parishes of the Archdiocese. The proposed bill would place religious organizations under the oversight provisions of the Massachusetts Public Charities Law, which empowers the Attorney General to investigate the use of charitable funds. Depending on the results of any investigation the Attorney General, with court approval, could overrule a church or parish decision concerning the allocation of their resources. Additionally, each year every religious entity, including all parishes, would have to register with the Attorney General's office in order to take up any collections. All parishes and churches would have to indicate their intent to solicit funds, the purpose of the solicitation, and then provide the Attorney General's office the results of the solicitation. A requirement that churches and religious organizations register their charitable activity with the government is inconsistent with our Nation's and our Commonwealth's constitutional guarantees of religious freedom.

Senate 1074's sponsors and proponents are candid about having filed this bill in response to their disagreement with the Archdiocese's decisions concerning parish closings and finances. They want to use legislation as a means of exercising control over the affairs of the Archdiocese and its parishes. This is not the role of government. This proposed legislation would violate religious freedom not so much because it would require religious entities to file some forms, but because it would do so for the purpose of having government take sides in a religious dispute. The United States Supreme Court has determined that government may not "lend its power to one or the other side in controversies over religious authority and dogma." This bill would entangle government in the internal workings of every religion.

Senate 1074 is currently scheduled for debate in the Massachusetts House of Representatives on Wednesday, January 25, 2006. We need your help to defeat this bill. Please email, telephone or write to your local representatives and senators and ask each of them to oppose Senate 1074. Explain to your lawmakers your concerns about the possibility of a law being enacted because of some people being in disagreement with decisions made by the Catholic Church. If at all possible, parish representatives should personally speak with local legislators by inviting them to your church or meeting with them at their local office. For the good of the Archdiocese and our parishes we must act now.

Thank you for all that you do on behalf of the Church and your parish, and in particular thank you for your efforts to defeat Senate 1074. This bill runs counter to the deepest traditions of our American freedoms and will do great harm to all churches. As the people of the Catholic Church, and with respect for people of all faiths, we must not allow this bill to be enacted.

Seán P. O'Malley, OFM Cap
Archbishop of Boston