

Pastors Continue D.C. Marriage Fight

✖ Bishop Harry Jackson and seven other ministry leaders filed a request with the District of Columbia elections board on Tuesday calling for a public vote next year on whether same-sex marriage should be legalized in the nation's capital.

The proposed initiative, filed by the Stand4Marriage D.C. coalition, which Jackson leads, comes in anticipation of moves to legalize gay marriage in the District. Council member David A. Catania, who is gay, has said he plans to file a bill to legalize same-sex marriage sometime this fall. In May, the council passed a measure recognizing gay marriages performed elsewhere.

"We are going to ... get back the vote and the opportunity to the people for them to have their voice heard," said Jackson, who believes most Washington, D.C., residents oppose same-sex marriage, in a statement posted on YouTube. "The other side believes that if they can win Washington, D.C., then what they'll actually do is set forth a standard whereby everybody in the nation will have to accept same-sex marriage no matter where the marriage was originated or performed."

(Watch Jackson's statement at end of article.)

Because Congress has jurisdiction over the district and can overturn measures passed by the City Council, Jackson is calling for a grass-roots effort to urge federal lawmakers to oppose gay- marriage legislation introduced in the district.

He said allowing gay marriage in the district also would

directly challenge the federal Defense of Marriage of Act (DOMA), which defines marriage as the union of one man and one woman and protects states from having to recognize same-sex marriages performed elsewhere. Although the Obama administration defended DOMA earlier this year when it was challenged in a lawsuit, it filed a brief last month calling for its repeal.

"We simply believe that if those who really care about family get a chance to vote about it, they will turn the tide and we will win the battle," said Jackson, who is also pastor of Hope Christian Church in suburban Maryland.

Congress did not intervene in May when the council passed the bill recognizing same-sex marriages performed elsewhere. The two-member D.C. Board of Elections and Ethics also denied Jackson's previous request to hold a referendum to block the bill, citing the 1977 Human Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination against minority groups, including homosexuals.

Jackson said the ballot initiative "would allow the people of the district to decide this important issue, not a 13-person panel." The proposed initiative reads, "Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid and recognized in the District of Columbia."

Jackson and the mostly African-American pastors who have rallied in support of traditional marriage are being joined by Washington Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl, whose participation observers say could complicate the council's efforts to legalize gay marriage.

On Tuesday, Wuerl sent a letter to 300 area Catholic priests, reminding them of the church's opposition to gay marriage, and participated in several media interviews to raise the Catholic Church's visibility in the marriage debate.

"We will continue to let the voice of the church, the teachings of the church, be heard as clearly as it can be

heard,” Wuerl said, according to the *Washington Post*. “That is why we have sent out so much material to our priests to help them explain this to our faithful people.”

Council member Catania said the Catholic Church’s increased involvement would not derail his efforts.

“We have a long tradition in this city of evolving toward equality and a better, more expansive view of human rights, and in 2009 this includes marriage equality for same-sex couples,” said Catania, according to the *Washington Post*. “I respect the bishop for his view ... but we live in a representative democracy where there is a separation of church and state. We do not live in a theocracy.”

{youtube}mS31fVaJ9hE{/youtube}