

The lack of specificity in House Bill 57 is concerning. Government can have a role in helping to preserve families, and prepare individuals for family life. If government chooses to do so, however, it must proceed in a manner that provides options to the individuals involved, and must respect the decision of the applicants to select a religious or secular counselor, provided that the counselor is qualified to perform the service. While the intent of House Bill 57 may be to provide options to the applicants, and lacks specific details in order to maximize options, I believe the bill leaves too much discretion to local officials to recognize, or fail to recognize, courses for selective reasons. Florida's law demonstrates that it is possible to craft legislation on this topic that provides clear direction and builds upon existing regulatory and religious structures, while preserving the options and respecting the rights of participants in the courses. House Bill 57 does not strike this balance.

Although the bill offers only a small monetary incentive to promote premarriage education, it is well-intentioned. Efforts small and large are necessary to help individuals better prepare to function in a family setting. I am concerned that the bill, as drafted and passed, is silent in too many areas, and may have the unintended effect of limiting the options available to some marriage license applicants in Anne Arundel County. The incentive should apply broadly and encourage many people to participate in this type of course. The law, however, should be sufficiently specific to inform individuals of the acceptable courses, and preserve options for individuals who want to receive quality premarriage education.

For these reasons, I have vetoed House Bill 57.

Sincerely,
Parris N. Glendening
Governor

House Bill No. 57

AN ACT concerning

Anne Arundel County - Marriage License Fee - Premarriage Education

FOR the purpose of reducing the marriage license fee in Anne Arundel County for couples who have completed a premarriage education course within a certain time period before applying for a license; providing for disposition of the fee; requiring the Anne Arundel County Health Department to compile and provide to the clerk of the circuit court a list of premarriage education courses in the county and adjacent counties; requiring the clerk to make the list available to marriage license applicants; defining a certain term; and generally relating to marriage license fees in Anne Arundel County.

BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,

Article - Family Law

Section 2-404(a)

Annotated Code of Maryland

(1999 Replacement Volume and 1999 Supplement)