Firestorm of opposition is ignited

Thousands trample anti-Catholic bill

Experts weigh in on proposed legislation

By Jack Sheedy

HARTFORD — When Catholics learned of a proposed bill that would strip pastors and bishops of governing powers, most immediately saw it as a threat to the First Amendment. According to expert testimony on March 11 at the Legislative Office Building, they were right.

“The First Amendment to the United States Constitution says that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or inhibiting the free exercise thereof,” said John Garvey, dean of Boston College School of Law. He reminded a mostly sympa-
thetic panel of lawmakers — many of them embattled members of the Judiciary Committee, which introduced the controversial S.B. 1098 — that while some countries may choose to establish a state religion, America’s founders chose not to do so. S.B. 1098, Dr. Garvey said, would change the Catholic Church’s chosen structure.

He quoted former Supreme Court Justice William F. Brennan’s majority opinion in a 1976 case: “Religious freedom encompasses the power [of religious bodies] to ‘disaffiliate themselves, free from state interference, matters of church government as well as those of faith doctrine.’”

Jesus Father Richard Rycavage, professor of sociology and the director of the Center for Faith and Public Life at Fairfield University, called the bill a brazen and poorly drafted intrusion into the life of a

By Mary Chalupsky

HARTFORD — Waving signs proclaiming “leave our Church alone,” “religious freedom” and “the Catholic Church is Christ’s Church,” more than 4,000 Catholics from throughout Connecticut stood with people from other faiths and states on March 11 to express their disbelief and outrage over S.B. 1098.

The up roar drew attention across the country.

Bent on sending a message after the bill was recalled, Hartford Archbishop Henry J. Mansell — joined by Bishop William E. Lori of Bridgeport; Bishop Michael R. Cote of Norwich; Carl Anderson, supreme knight of the Knights of Columbus; and other leaders — urged Catholics to go to Hartford to have their voices heard.

Even Gov. M. Jodi Rell weighed in with a statement on the bill, charging that the “proposal was blatantly unconstitutional, insensi-
tive and inappropriate.”

At the rally March 11, Bishop Cote charged that the bill “singles out Catholic entities for disparate treatment. No other church or reli-
gion in the state is being subjected to this maltreatment. Today it is the Roman Catholic Church,” he said. “Who will be next?”

“Those who proposed this bill have embarrassed themselves and the State of Connecticut,” said Archbishop Mansell, arguing that it makes no sense for a state with a $1-billion deficit to tell the Church how to run its finances.

When the massive crowd responded with, “We vote. We vote,”

By Mary Chalupsky

HARTFORD — Archdiocese Of Law, testify in Hartford March 11, according to best practices in temporal affairs of the Church.

Bishop Rosazza recalls his time in the spotlight

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