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Washington Catholic Charities criticized

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NCR Today

The *Washington Post* on 3/5/10 reports that the former chief operating officer of Catholic Charities of Washington, DC, Tim Sawina, has called on the Archdiocese to reverse its decision to cancel health benefits for spouses of employees. He publicly called that decision "devastating" and "wrong," and he said it is causing current employees to look for jobs elsewhere.

Earlier this week, Archbishop Donald Wuerl of Washington made the decision to eliminate spousal health benefits to avoid paying them to same sex partners now that the District of Columbia has legalized gay marriage.

Employees of Catholic Charities, speaking to the *Post* on condition of anonymity, said that many inside the organization were dismayed and upset by the decision. Others charged that it will deter recruitment, and that Catholic Charities is already losing respect in the District.

Sawina, who is a former priest, in a letter to the governing boards of Catholic Charities, took on the archbishop directly. "Some, including the archbishop, have argued that by providing health care to a gay or lesbian spouse we are somehow legitimizing gay marriage," said Sawina. "Providing health care to a gay or lesbian partner -- a basic human right, according to church teaching -- is an end in itself and no more legitimizes that marriage than giving communion to a divorced person legitimizes divorce, or giving food or shelter to an alcoholic legitimizes alcoholism."

The archdiocese defended the decision, saying that the Wuerl had consulted theologians, Catholic Charities executives and legal experts.

Sawina deserves support in this, and his observations are "right on." This action by the archdiocese is truly scandalous. Apparently, the social justice agenda of the church continues to take second place to issues of sexuality.

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