



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

February 4, 2020

SB 234

Vehicle Laws – Suspension of Driver’s License or Registration – Unpaid Citations or Judgments

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic Conference (“Conference”) represents the public policy interests of the three Roman Catholic (arch)dioceses serving Maryland: the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington.

Senate Bill 234 prohibits the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) from suspending a person’s driver’s license due to the nonpayment of a traffic citation or judgment, or the nonpayment of a payment installment plan. It allows the MVA instead to seek a civil judgment in the amount of the outstanding fine. The bill also sets more flexibility for installment plans, including how long they can last for, as opposed to the current ten month time limit.

The Conference routinely supports legislative efforts to decriminalize poverty, especially when those who are charged with the crimes are disproportionately low-income and unable to avoid the subsequent consequences associated with, though not always comparative to, the committal of the crime. Senate Bill 234 aims to tackle some of those consequences, specifically the tailspin that can occur if a person is unable to pay a fine associated with a minor traffic citation or judgment. These could include spiraling into further debt, the loss of transportation options to and from work, education, or family obligations if a person’s license is suspended, or even incarceration if a person is found driving on a suspended license. Allowing for a civil judgment instead of a suspension of a person’s license aims to keep those unable to pay fines – disproportionately those who are low-income or living at, close to, or below the poverty line – away from incarceration, which is a seemingly unequal and unjust punishment for being poor.

The Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 234.