



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

**March 11, 2021**

**HB 891**

**Higher Education – Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program – Established**

**House Appropriation 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.

House Bill 891 would establish the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program through the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), which would work to address and combat student hunger and basic food necessities on college and university campuses throughout the state. It would further certify campuses that meet criteria such as the creation of a Hunger Task Force and providing a food pantry on campus as “hunger-free,” as well as provide assistance to those needing to apply for food supplement benefits.

The Church is a strong and steady voice for programs that help alleviate poverty and its effects, stating that “[o]ur commitment to the dignity of every person requires a special concern for those who are poor and vulnerable, whose needs are greatest, and whose lives and dignity are often threatened by hunger, poverty, and suffering.” (*For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food*, 2003)

The Conference historically and routinely supports legislation aimed at addressing food insecurity and other such poverty ailments among vulnerable and often marginalized populations in the state. A common misconception is that a student pursuing higher education means that they or their families are financially secure. In reality, this is not always the case, as students are often unable to escape the burdens of poverty in all educational grade levels and pursuits. Students at colleges and universities who face food insecurity and hunger often exist in the shadows, especially when support systems are either inadequate to address the need or not in place at all. House Bill 891 is a crucial first step in addressing this serious and overlooked concern, especially for students who may be additionally vulnerable due to other factors such as citizenship status, familial instability, or other economic barriers, including homelessness.

The Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 891.