



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

March 25, 2021

House Bill 373

Education – Child Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Prevention – Hiring Emergent Employees

Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee

SUPPORT

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 373. We offer this testimony on behalf of the families of approximately 50,000 students served by more than 150 PreK-12 Catholic schools in Maryland. The Conference represents the public policy interests of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington and the Diocese of Wilmington, which together encompass over one million Marylanders.

House Bill 373 offers some practical amendments to a law passed two years, which the Conference supported. The law required new background check procedures for hiring in all Maryland schools. The bill established a process for public and nonpublic schools to determine whether prospective employees who have direct contact with minors have ever been disciplined for allegations of child sexual abuse or sexual misconduct. The bill also required additional screening by establishing a process for MSDE to consult a teacher certification database upon a school's request.

Maryland's Catholic schools have long observed stringent child protection measures beyond what was previously required by the State. Upon the passage of the 2019 law, the schools also immediately implemented a system for compliance with the new law. As a matter of course, Catholic schools conduct mandatory criminal background checks on all employees and on volunteers who work with children, provide comprehensive awareness training to educate adults and children on how to recognize predatory behaviors, and promptly report all suspected incidents of child sexual abuse.

The provisions of House Bill 373 would provide classroom continuity through "emergent hires" while background checks under the 2019 law are pending. This is a commonsense provision to allow schools to hire on a temporary basis, pending due diligence regarding employment history. Because the bill incorporates proper safeguards for schools and students while employment history checks are pending, as well as remedial measures upon a negative report or finding, this bill addresses the practical needs of schools and teachers in a way that keeps students protected. It is for these reasons that the Conference respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 373.