



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

**March 16, 2021**

**HB 448**

**State Government – Legal and Employee Holiday – Juneteenth National Freedom Day**

**House Health and Government Operations Committee**

**SUPPORT**

The Maryland Catholic Conference represents the mutual public policy interests of the three (arch)dioceses serving the state of Maryland, including the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington. We offer this testimony in support of House Bill 448 which would establish Juneteenth National Freedom Day as a State legal holiday and a State employee holiday.

Juneteenth has come to symbolize for many African Americans the triumph of the human spirit over the cruelty of slavery and is celebrated annually in more than 205 cities and commemorated in 47 states. Elevating this historic and significant event to a State legal holiday will give Marylanders the opportunity to acknowledge and honor a major milestone in our country's history. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have reminded us in their recent pastoral letter on racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love Again*, that *"The evil of racism festers in part because, as a nation, there has been very limited formal acknowledgement of the harm done to so many, no moment of atonement, no national process of reconciliation and, all too often a neglect of our history. Many of our institutions still harbor, and too many of our laws still sanction, practices that deny justice and equal access to certain groups of people. God demands more from us."*

Having Juneteenth National Freedom Day recognized as a State legal holiday creates opportunities for events to happen throughout the State to help educate Marylanders on the significance of this day while at the same time providing an environment for remembrance and healing.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge a favorable report on House Bill 448.