

**Senate Bill 232
Civil Cases - Surcharges**

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
January 26, 2021

Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore strongly supports SB 232, which institutes a modest increase to surcharges on certain court filing fees, a long-standing source of funding for the Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC).

Inspired by the gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. As the largest human service provider in Maryland working with tens of thousands of youth, individuals, and families each year, we recognize how vitally important access to civil legal services are to the health, safety, and well-being of the clients we serve.

Each day, Catholic Charities staff interact with Marylanders facing challenges and difficulties, those challenges and difficulties that have only escalated during the Pandemic. COVID-19 has laid bare longstanding inequities in our systems, including inequitable access to civil legal services. As both a beneficiary of MLSC funding and as a partner of many of the grantees, we strongly support SB 232. The examples below highlight the crucial work performed by MLSC grantees to improve the lives of vulnerable Marylanders.

Our new neighbors in the immigrant community often lack access to the protections provided for in our legal system because they are not represented in immigration proceedings. MLSC provides funding for organizations like Catholic Charities Esperanza Center allowing our Immigration Legal Services program can assist clients and their family members seeking to obtain, extend, or retain lawful immigration status or citizenship in the United States.

At programs such as Our Daily Bread Employment Center and Sarah's House, we offer services to assist individuals experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness apply for public benefits. It is not unusual for there to be issues with the processing of their benefits or incorrect terminations of benefits. Homeless Persons Representation Project has been a critical partner by helping our mutual clients with appeals of benefit determinations allowing them to access the benefits they are entitled to.

Through our programs with individuals with disabilities and youth with behavioral health diagnoses, we have seen the power of Disabilities Rights Maryland. Their representation of our mutual clients ensures that the clients are receiving appropriate services in the community, in institutional settings, and in schools. They push us to be a better service provider. Their work supports an integrated and just society for people with disabilities.

Without MLSC funding the organizations described above and many other grantees would not be able to offer much needed civil legal services to low income and no income Marylanders. SB 232 will provide for the financial stability of MLSC so these services can continue. **On behalf of the individuals and families we work with, Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration, and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for SB 232.**

Submitted By: Regan K. Vaughan, Director of Advocacy