



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

**February 23, 2021**

**SB 550**

**Sheila E. Hixson Behavioral Health Services Matching Grant Program for Service Members and Veterans – Establishment**

**Senate Finance Committee  
Senate Budget and Taxation 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 550 establishes the Sheila E. Hixson Behavioral Health Services Matching Grant Program for Service Members and Veterans within the Maryland Department of Health, and states that the Governor may include \$2.5 million in the annual budget for the program.

Behavioral health issues, including depression and suicide, are public health challenges that causes immeasurable pain among individuals, families, and communities across the country. This is an urgent issue that the Maryland General Assembly and citizens of Maryland must address, working to protect and help the men and women who have bravely fought and served our state and country.

Strengthening protective factors can help prevent suicide by promoting physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness. For example, building the problem-solving skills and social support of service members transitioning from the military can help them better cope with future challenges as veterans. A focus on strengthening protective factors should be the norm rather than the exception. A complex challenge like addressing the behavioral health needs of service members, veterans, and their families will only be solved with a broad, coordinated approach that reaches across many sectors.

Former Delegate Sheila Hixson was a stalwart advocate for the needs of service members and veterans, especially those needing additional support after leaving active duty. It is only appropriate that a program to address these needs bears her name and legacy.

The Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 550.