



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

**February 16, 2021**

**House Bill 478**

**Civil Cases - Surcharges**

**House Judiciary Committee**

**Position: SUPPORT**

The Maryland Catholic Conference represents the mutual public-policy interests of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, including the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington. We offer this testimony in support of House Bill 478.

House Bill 478 would provide for modest increases to surcharges on certain court filing fees, a long-standing source of funding for the Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC). MLSC currently provides funding to 36 nonprofit civil legal aid organizations across the state. One of the recipients of this funding is Catholic Charities' of the Archdiocese of Washington Immigration Legal Services Program, a long-standing provider of legal services in Maryland.

The funds that are provided play a vital role in protecting and assisting low-income foreign-born residents of Maryland. As Pope Francis has remarked, *"Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society. This demands that we be docile and attentive to the cry of the poor and to come to their aid."* The work of organizations such as Catholic Charities' Immigration Legal Services Program is vital to providing aid to those in our communities who need it most, especially during these very difficult times.

House Bill 478 is an important and much needed bill to enhance essential funding to MLSC which is a source of funding for legal aid providers to continue providing life-changing services to those most in need.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on House Bill 478.