



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

February 5, 2021

HB 608

**Early Childhood Education - Child Care Provider Support Grant Program
(The Child Care Provider Support Act)**

**House Appropriations Committee
House Ways & Means Committee**

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 608. 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 608 would establish a grant program through the Maryland Department of Commerce to support Maryland's child care providers, many of whom are beleaguered by the coronavirus pandemic. In order to be eligible for a grant, the bill requires that a program have already been in existence at the start of the pandemic and be currently open and operational and in good standing with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). Furthermore, grants will be limited to child care providers who have experienced a loss in enrollment of at least 20% for a period of at least two months of the pandemic.

These grants would provide much needed support to a vital and essential sector of Marylander's everyday lives. Sixteen percent of providers have been forced to close their doors in Maryland since early 2020, leading to less options for child care access for working families. With the passage of this bill, pandemic-afflicted child care providers will be able to use grants to pay for such items as rent or mortgage expenses, utilities and payroll, helping to keep providers employed and afloat in this difficult time.

Child Care is an essential component to supporting strong, economically secure families. Additionally, the Church supports this bill as a part of its priority interest in alleviating poverty in our state, as enabling working parents' continued access to child care services is an imperative part of combating of poverty. Often, a barrier to sustainable and full-time employment is the availability and affordability of reliable child care services. The State should do all it can to support access to child care services for working parents.

The Conference appreciates your consideration, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 608.