



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

March 15, 2022

SB 971

Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - School Lunch

**Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Senate Budget & 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 971 requires an eligible school that receives a per pupil grant under the Concentration of Poverty Grant Program to provide free school lunch to each student at the eligible school under certain circumstances; prohibiting a county board of education from charging students for school lunch at an eligible school; and requiring certain funding to be provided in the State budget to provide certain students with free school lunch.

The Church is a strong and steady voice for programs that help alleviate poverty and its effects, stating that “[o]ur commitment to the dignity of every person requires a special concern for those who are poor and vulnerable, whose needs are greatest, and whose lives and dignity are often threatened by hunger, poverty, and suffering.” (*For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food*, 2003)

The Conference historically and routinely supports legislation aimed at addressing food insecurity and other such poverty ailments among vulnerable and often marginalized populations in the state. Students who face food insecurity and hunger often exist in the shadows, especially when support systems are either inadequate to address the need or not in place at all. Senate Bill 971 is a crucial first step in addressing this serious and overlooked concern, especially for students who may be additionally vulnerable due to other factors such as citizenship status, familial instability, or other economic barriers, including homelessness.

The Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 971.