



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

March 23, 2022

House Bill 165

**Education – Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program –
Human and Sex Trafficking**

Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic 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 165 requires age-appropriate educational programming on awareness and prevention of human trafficking to be included in existing sexual abuse and assault prevention curriculum for students in grades six through eight.

Promoting awareness about the realities of human trafficking is essential in the fight to combat it. Maryland is uniquely positioned to be a “hot spot” for human trafficking activity, due to the interstate highways that run through it, its close proximity to numerous large cities, and its ports of call and major international airports. Unfortunately, few Marylanders are aware of the presence of human trafficking in the state, leaving traffickers hidden and children more vulnerable to exploitation. Education on the awareness and prevention of human trafficking in an age-appropriate way for all students in Maryland is a crucial first step in adding more eyes and ears to anti-trafficking efforts.

The Conference was also a strong supporter of Erin’s Law which passed in 2016, requiring all public and nonpublic schools to implement a child abuse curriculum, and participated in the follow up workgroup created by MSDE to implement the law. Thanks to the existing programs operated by the three archdioceses in Maryland, the Church was able to provide the workgroup numerous examples of best practices and other expertise in child abuse prevention programs. This bill will be a helpful supplement to the child abuse curriculum already in place in Maryland schools.

The Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on **HB 165**.