



**MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE**

March 06, 2024

HB 842

Environmental Justice – Investment in Infrastructure Construction Projects

House Appropriations Committee

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) offers this testimony in support of House Bill 842. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

House Bill 842 would require a State agency, when administering certain federal funds to direct those funds to infrastructure projects in underserved communities, communities of color, and communities with a high percentage of low-to moderate-income households. This legislation is a critical step towards addressing systemic inequities and ensuring that all residents of our state have access to essential infrastructure and services.

The principle of solidarity calls us to stand with the most vulnerable and marginalized members of society. Too often, communities of color, low-income households, and underserved areas are disproportionately burdened by inadequate infrastructure, including crumbling roads, outdated water systems, and inadequate public transportation. By directing federal funds towards infrastructure projects in these communities, we affirm their inherent dignity and recognize their right to access safe and reliable infrastructure that supports their well-being and flourishing.

Our Catholic tradition emphasizes the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, urging us to prioritize the needs of those who are most marginalized in society. Investing in infrastructure projects in overburdened communities and underserved areas is essential for promoting the common good and building a society where all individuals and communities can thrive.

The provision in the legislation that requires a State agency to identify overburdened communities, underserved communities, and communities of color, and to conduct listening sessions to ensure that the needs and perspectives of residents are taken into account is commendable. This approach reflects a commitment to community engagement and empowerment. By addressing systemic disparities and investing in the well-being of all residents, we can create a more just and equitable society for present and future generations.

The MCC appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 842.

