



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

March 7, 2024

HB 209

Prison Education Delivery Reform Commission

House Judiciary Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) offers this testimony in support of House Bill 209. 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 209 would establish the Prison Education Delivery Reform Commission. The Commission would be required to convene an advisory stakeholder group with specific qualifications and work with the advisory stakeholder group to conduct roundtable discussion forums seeking public input in all geographic regions of the State. The Commission would also have to develop an education-focused statewide framework of policies to invest in strategies to increase public safety and reduce recidivism of adult offenders. The Commission would be charged with gathering stakeholder input on research best practices for the primary, secondary, postsecondary, and career or vocational education of those who are subject to the criminal and juvenile justice systems. Lastly, the Commission would identify measures to mitigate risk factors that contribute to adult contact with the criminal justice system, with a focus on education.

In its pastoral statement *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice* (USCCB, 2000), the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops cited the "absence of educational opportunities" among considerations "contributing to a high rate of recidivism". The USCCB also cited "education" as one of the key "necessities that enable inmates to live in dignity".

The MCC firmly supports systems of restorative justice, as the same are rooted in our faith tenets. Access to education within corrections systems are a core value in systems of truly restorative justice. As opposed to a lock-and-key system of punishment, this legislation may better equip Maryland to propel incarcerated individuals to a world of opportunity, enabling successful reintegration into society and empower formerly incarcerated individuals to experience the dignity of work and provide direction in their lives outside of the prison walls.

For these reasons, the MCC urges a favorable report on House Bill 209.