



MARYLAND  
CATHOLIC  
CONFERENCE

February 9, 2024

**House Bill 87**  
**Criminal Law – Death Penalty**  
**House Judiciary Committee**

**Position: Unfavorable**

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) 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 87** provides that a person who is convicted of first-degree murder may be sentenced to death under certain circumstances; establishing certain procedures relating to custody, warrant of execution, incompetency, method of execution, witness, certificate, disposition of body, notice, trial, sentencing, review, and appeal in relation to the imposition of the death penalty; and generally relating to the death penalty.

In 2013, Maryland became the 18th state to abolish the death penalty, choosing instead to impose life sentences without the possibility of parole. However, House Bill 87 proposes the introduction of irreversible and inhumane punishments, raising significant apprehensions. Particularly alarming is the potential for pronounced racial disparities, with 71.5 percent of the inmates in Maryland being black.<sup>1</sup> This aspect underscores a pressing concern about the equitable application of such penalties, with a disproportionate impact on the black community, potentially perpetuating systemic issues within the criminal justice system.

Executing an inmate, regardless of the crime committed, is widely regarded as inhumane. This perspective is rooted in the belief that effective detention systems have been established to protect citizens from repeat offenses. Furthermore, the act of carrying out an execution denies the convicted offender the opportunity for redemption or remorse. It is crucial to recognize that a person's dignity remains intact despite their actions. House Bill 87 poses a threat to the inviolability and dignity of individuals by introducing irreversible and inhumane punishments.

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<sup>1</sup><https://dpscs.maryland.gov/publicinfo/publications/pdfs/Inmate%20Characteristics%20Report%20FY%202022%20Q4.pdf>

The MCC aligns with many in the faith community opposing the death penalty. Opposition is grounded not only in the violation of the fundamental belief in the sanctity of life but also in the various risks associated with this legislation. The Catholic Conference is dedicated to upholding the dignity of all life, from conception to natural death.

For these reasons, the Maryland Catholic Conference asks for a favorable report on **HB 87**.

Thank you for your consideration.