



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

**January 28, 2020**

**HB 246**

**Sexual Solicitation of a Minor – Solicitation Through Parent, Guardian, or Custodian – Prohibition and Penalties**

**House Judiciary 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.

House Bill 246 prohibits a person from knowingly soliciting the consent of the parent, guardian, or custodian of a minor to engage in certain unlawful activities. Among those activities include those related to curtailing human trafficking, such as engaging in prostitution, receiving the earnings of a prostitute, procuring or soliciting prostitution, and maintaining a house of prostitution.

The Conference strongly supports efforts to eradicate human trafficking by strengthening laws protecting victims against traffickers, providing services and rehabilitation to victims, and increasing awareness of the issue. Pope Francis has strenuously called on society to make every effort to eradicate sex trafficking, which he has called a “shameful and intolerable crime.” Moreover, he has urged government officials to “combat this scourge with firmness, giving voice to our younger brothers and sisters who have been wounded in their dignity, and constitutes a true crime against humanity.”

Human trafficking – both sex trafficking and labor trafficking – strips the dignity from a person and is considered modern-day slavery. Twenty-five percent of all victims of sex trafficking are under the age of seventeen. This is a crisis that must be addressed. House Bill 246 is a crucial and necessary step towards that goal, as it seeks to assist efforts to catch traffickers who have historically slipped through the cracks or have been unable to be arrested or prosecuted previously.

The Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 246.