



**February 6, 2020**

**House Bill 460**

**Department of Human Services – Child Abuse Prevention – Online Course**

**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 460 would require the Department of Human Services to post a free online course, concerning the identification, prevention, and reporting of child abuse, on its website. HB 460 is an important measure to help raise awareness in our communities about how to prevent abuse, to recognize the signs of a child who may be the victim of abuse, and importantly, how to properly report incidents of suspected or actual abuse. This bill would offer a promising opportunity to create safer environments for our children and our communities.

Like many other institutions serving children, all Catholic parishes, diocesan schools and youth programs observe stringent child protection measures. Our institutions conduct mandatory criminal background checks on all employees and on volunteers who work with children, provide comprehensive awareness training to educate adults and children on how to recognize predatory behaviors, and promptly report all suspected incidents of child sexual abuse.

It has been our experience that the required training provided to all professionals in our institutions has significantly increased our ability to protect children, and to immediately address instances of suspected abuse.

Having a free online course available on the Department of Human Services website concerning the identification, prevention and reporting of child abuse, would be a tremendous resource to those who don’t already have access to this type of instruction and coursework.

The Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 460.

