



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

February 10, 2021

SB 397

Correctional Services - Diminution Credits – Education

Senate Judiciary Proceedings Committee

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 397. The Catholic Conference represents the public policy interests of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, including the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington and the Diocese of Wilmington, which together encompass over one million Marylanders.

Senate Bill 397 would afford inmates to earn diminution credits for successfully reaching each of the following academic milestones: a.) an intermediate high academic certificate, b.) completion of a technical or vocational training program, c.) a high school diploma, d.) an associate degree, and e.) a bachelor's degree.

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".

Additionally, the Conference firmly supports restorative justice practices. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has stated that "People must be held accountable for their actions but justice and restoration must be the object of punishment which must have a constructive and reformatory purpose" (*Restorative Justice: Healing and Transformation of Persons, Families and Communities*, USCCB, 2015).

Senate Bill 397 is a restorative justice measure and the Church maintains that systems of incarceration should always be centered on *restorative* justice. When inmates are incentivized to obtain an education, or further their academic credentials, their chances to break free from their often-challenging circumstances and live productive lives post-release are exponentially enhanced. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 397.