



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

January 26, 2021

**SB 164**

**Veterans - Behavioral Health Services - Mental Health First Aid**

**Senate Finance 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.

Senate Bill 164 will require that the behavioral health services for which the Maryland Department of Health provides service coordination for veterans under certain provisions of law include mental health first aid; requiring that mental health first aid consist of training for veterans and the immediate family members of veterans on how to identify and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorders; requiring entities teaching a mental health first aid course to report certain information to the Department.

Behavioral health issues, including depression and suicide, are public health challenges that causes immeasurable pain among individuals, families, and communities across the country. This is an urgent issue that the Maryland General Assembly and citizens of Maryland must address, working to protect and help the veterans and their families who have bravely fought and served our state and country.

Those experiencing mental illness are among the most marginalized and underserved in our society. The Catholic Church through its parishes, charities and other ministries reaches out pastorally to those struggling with mental illness. Because the Catholic faith embraces an integrated view of the human person as both corporeal and spiritual, we welcome the sciences as one pathway to knowledge of the human person. Pope St. John Paul II said *"Whoever suffers from mental illness always bears God's image and likeness in themselves, as does every human being. In addition, they always have the inalienable right not only to be considered as an image of God and therefore as a person, but also to be treated as such."*

The Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 164.