

**House Bill 612  
Recovery for the Economy, Livelihoods, Industries, Entrepreneurs, and Families  
(RELIEF Act)**

Ways & Means Committee  
February 4, 2021

**Support with Amendments**

Catholic Charities of Baltimore strongly supports House Bill 612, which provides economic relief from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Inspired by the gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. As the largest human service provider in Maryland working with tens of thousands of youth, individuals, and families each year, we recognize the importance of providing vital supports for individuals and families who have been devastated by the pandemic.

Each day, Catholic Charities staff interact with Marylanders facing challenges and difficulties, and many of those challenges and difficulties have only escalated during the Pandemic. COVID-19 has laid to bare longstanding inequities in our systems, including in housing, healthcare, and benefit accessibility.

We are supportive of the actions proposed in this bill, but ask you take the RELIEF further. First, we ask the committee to expand the stimulus payments to low-income Marylanders to include tax payers who file under an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN). Despite working and being tax filers, those who file under an ITIN do not qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), so they are currently excluded from the relief envisioned in this bill. At the same time, the immigrant community has been disparately impacted by the pandemic they have had some of the highest COVID positivity rates – often serving as essential workers - and have been denied access to various stimulus packages. We should treat our Maryland immigrant neighbors as we treat our non-immigrant neighbors and include them in RELIEF.

Additionally, we ask that the committee adopt the amendments added by the Senate to the cross-file of this bill. We would like to particularly emphasize the amendments that:

- Increase and restore benefits under the Temporary Disability Assistance Program, which saw a caseload decline during the pandemic due to the inability of recipients to prove eligibility due to difficulty scheduling in-person medical appointments.
- Offer arrearage assistance through the Office of Home Energy Programs for families and individuals with utility debt.
- Provide housing and legal assistance to address the eviction crisis.
- Fund mental health COVID Initiatives to provide mobile crisis and stand-alone walk-in crisis services.
- Create grants for DDA community providers to assist with pandemic-related reopening, transformation, and revenue loss.

**On behalf of the individuals and families we work with, Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration, and urges the committee to issue a favorable with amendments report for House Bill 612.**

Submitted By: Regan K. Vaughan, Director of Advocacy