



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

February 22, 2022

HB 517

**Consumer Health Access Program for Mental Health and Addiction Care - Establishment**

**House Government and Operations 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 517 establishes the Consumer Health Access Program for Mental Health and Addiction Care to assist State residents in accessing mental health and substance use disorder services under public and private health insurance and address insurance-related barriers to mental health and substance use disorder services; establishing certain requirements for the Program relating to consumer medical records and other information; requiring the Program to promote equity in access to mental health and substance use disorder services.

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 individuals and their families facing mental health issues.

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 House Bill 517.