

House Bill 428**Community Schools-Rental Assistance for Community School Families Program and Fund-Establishment**

Budget and Taxation Committee

March 26, 2024

Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports HB 428, which will create an eviction prevention fund program for families with children enrolled in Maryland's community schools. We also understand and support the revision of eligibility criteria to include homeless students under the McKinney-Vento Act.

For a century, Catholic Charities has provided care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. We accompany Marylanders as they age with dignity, support their pursuit of employment and career advancement, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve economic independence, prepare for educational success, and welcome immigrant neighbors into Maryland communities.

As one of the largest human service providers in Maryland, we continually receive referrals for our Eviction Prevention Program. In Fiscal Year 2022, we received 793 referrals and successfully assisted 233 individuals. In Fiscal Year 2023, the number of referrals increased to 908, but the assistance provided decreased to 153 individuals. Currently, in the first half of Fiscal Year 2024, we have received an astounding 1656 referrals, yet regrettably, funding and program requirements limited our capacity to assist 75.

The significant surge in referrals, doubling from the previous fiscal year, highlights the growing demand for eviction prevention services. However, there is a concerning trend as the level of funding provided has decreased by 87 percent compared to the previous fiscal year.

It is evident that additional financial assistance is crucial to support Marylanders in maintaining stable housing, especially those with limited incomes. Many individuals we work with struggle to cover basic household bills, and the scarcity of affordable housing options further compounds the challenges for those earning low wages. The effectiveness of the financial assistance is evident in the fact that for our most recent cohort of individuals and families, 82% remained stably housed 6 months post-award.

Recent research is clear that preventing evictions stabilizes the family, the school, and the community. Students facing eviction are 6 times more likely to be chronically absent and 4 times more likely to not complete high school,ⁱ and students who have experienced housing insecurity were more likely to have a lower GPA as well as poorer mental health outcomes.ⁱⁱ The National Center on Family Homelessness estimates that the graduation rate of children experiencing homelessness is less than 25%.ⁱⁱⁱ The overarching message is clear: families cannot thrive without safe, stable housing, and schools cannot thrive with a student body forced to endure unstable housing conditions.

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 report for HB 428.

Submitted By: Madelin Martinez, Assistant Director of Advocacy

ⁱ <https://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/publications/study-homeless-and-highly-mobile-students-san-mateo-county/housing-instability-and>

ⁱⁱ Mariah Kornbluh, et al., Exploring Housing Insecurity in Relation to Student Success, J Am Coll Health, Apr. 2022.

ⁱⁱⁱ Health Care for the Homeless, Homelessness in Maryland, <https://www.hchmd.org/homelessness-maryland> (last visited Dec. 1, 2023).