



MARYLAND  
CATHOLIC  
CONFERENCE

February 21, 2024

**HB 686**

**Youth Sports Programs - Venue-Specific Emergency Action Plans - Requirements**

**House Health & Government Operations Committee**

**Position: UNFAVORABLE**

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in opposition to House Bill 686. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government. We also speak on behalf of the families of more than 50,000 students served by over 150 PreK-12 Catholic schools in Maryland.

House Bill 686 would require all youth sports programs to develop *venue-specific* action plans for each facility that they use for sporting events even if they do not own the facility and that the plans include care coordination and severe weather emergency plans. This legislation also requires the onerous steps of ensuring the plans are distributed and then interactively rehearsed by all coaching staff members of each sport before each athletic season. The bill also requires that every member of a coaching staff be trained in the operation of particular medical devices, every coach hold certifications in the application of medical procedures, and that a trained member of that staff be present at each athletic event. This bill further requires the facilities (often unrelated to the league operators) to procure an automated external defibrillator for each sports event.

Many churches, schools and other nonprofit organizations run recreational sports leagues or tournaments, which play an integral role of providing an outlet for youth and bringing communities together. However, they rely on unpaid volunteer and community personnel. While these leagues and coaches do everything they can to protect the reasonable safety of their players on the field in the short time each week or month they engage in their respective recreational sports, the provisions of this bill extend much too far in time, scope and feasibility for most leagues.

Additionally, this bill presents serious liability concerns for recreational sports leagues and the entities that sponsor them, especially considering the volunteer nature of most organizers, coaches and participants. It also, as stated above, places numerous requirements on coaches to be trained in various medical and other procedures, as well as to regularly rehearse the same.

If any of these procedures, trainings, or provisions are not met, it is unclear as to whom liability would fall, what parties would be required to be insured and as to what, as well as how insurance companies would both cover and handle claims relative to all of the aforementioned considerations. Such considerations, as well as the onerous provisions of this bill, are likely to further discourage youth sports programs from operating in our state, presenting a serious disadvantage to youth structure and community cohesion in our state, particularly to vulnerable and lower-income communities. Youth sports are engrained in the very fabric of our state and are highly important to parents and children across Maryland.

While we appreciate the context of this legislation as a protective measure against sports injuries and the like, this legislation goes too far and we thus urge an unfavorable report on House Bill 686.