



Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home

Responding to the cry of the Earth
and the cry of the poor.

Hearing before the House Environment and Transportation Committee
Maryland General Assembly
March 26, 2024

Statement of Support (FAVORABLE) of Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home on SB 969, Whole Watershed Act

Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home (MCCH) is a lay-led organization of Catholics from parishes in the three Catholic dioceses in Maryland: the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington. It engages in education about, and advocacy based upon, the teachings of the Catholic Church relating to care for creation and respect for all life. MCCH is a grassroots voice for the understanding of Catholic social teaching held by a wide array of Maryland Catholics—over 500 Maryland Catholics have already signed our statement of support for key environmental bills in this session of the General Assembly—but it should be distinguished as an organization from the Maryland Catholic Conference, which represents the public policy interests of the bishops who lead these three dioceses.

MCCH would like to express its strong support for passage of Senate Bill 969, the Whole Watershed Act. MCCH appreciates the previous action taken by the Committee and the House of Delegates to pass the cross-filed bill, House Bill 1165. Both bills provide funding to restore five watershed watersheds around the state. Diverse communities will benefit, and the health of the Chesapeake Bay will also be protected. As Catholics, we view care for God’s creations, including the waterways, and care for vulnerable groups in society as an integral part of our faith, as taught by Pope Francis in his encyclical, *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*¹ (2015), and in his more recent apostolic exhortation, *Laudate Deum*² (2023).

In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis also draws attention to how the scarcity of clean water will lead to increases in the cost of food and products which depend on its use (*Laudato Si’*, no. 31)—all of which will impact the poor and most vulnerable more adversely.

Senate Bill 969, the Whole Watershed Act, is responsive to Pope Francis’s teaching that social problems “must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual deeds.” (*Laudato Si’*, no. 219) The Whole Watershed Act does so through a more expansive and comprehensive planning and permitting approach. In addition, and again in keeping with a central theme in *Laudato Si’*, the Whole Watershed Act prioritizes Environmental Justice communities. We believe that the Whole Watershed Act will move the State of Maryland forward in positive ways. From our Catholic faith perspective, this bill contributes to the restoration of our common home, promotes the common good, and helps meet the demands for social justice.

We strongly urge your support of Senate Bill 969. Thank you for your consideration of our views and our respectful request for a **favorable** report on Senate Bill 969, and resolution of any differences between the House of Delegates and the Senate in a way that results in the most effective watershed protection program for the State.

¹ The English text of the encyclical, to which the paragraph numbers in the parentheses refer, can be found at: Both bills https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

² The English text of the apostolic exhortation, to which the paragraph numbers in the parentheses refer, can be found at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20231004-laudate-deum.html