



MARYLAND  
CATHOLIC  
CONFERENCE

January 30, 2024

**HB 157**

**Public Schools - Appropriations for School Safety Expenditures - Increase (School Safety Enhancement Act of 2024)**

**House Appropriations Committee**

**Position: FAVORABLE w/ Amendments**

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony of favorable with amendments for House Bill 157. 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 offer this testimony on behalf of the families of more than 50,000 students served by over 150 PreK-12 Catholic schools in Maryland.

House Bill 157 increases the annual appropriation for the Safe Schools Fund from \$10,000,000 to \$20,000,000, beginning in fiscal year 2026. The Safe Schools Fund provides grants to local school systems and local law enforcement agencies for school safety.

The safety of our school students in all Maryland schools is a paramount concern, whether they attend a public or private school. One in eight Maryland students, or over 130,000, attend a nonpublic school. Prior to 2023, the state budget was providing \$3.5 million for lower-tuition nonpublic schools to receive a per pupil allocation grant for school safety and security measures, but that has been removed this year. Especially with increased threats upon members of denominations of our diverse group of Maryland faith-based schools, security dollars are of great need. **Thus, we respectfully request that this committee provide that same \$3.5 million in this legislation through the attached amendment.**

Many of the schools with lower-income student enrollments would not have been able to complete the security upgrades without this funding and should be able to continue to do so annually. The program is making an impact statewide and is highly popular with administrators in every jurisdiction. Student safety should not be determined by whether you attend a public or nonpublic school. For this reason, we urge this committee to adopt the aforementioned amendment and issue a favorable report on House Bill 157, as amended.

**Amendment No. 1**

Page 3, line 6, insert:

**7-1513. Nonpublic School Safety Improvement Grant Program**

- (A) There is a Nonpublic School Safety Improvement Grant Program.
- (B) The purpose of the Fund is to provide grants to nonpublic schools in the state to enhance school safety.
- (C) Beginning in fiscal year 2025 and each fiscal year thereafter, the governor shall provide at least \$3,500,000 to nonpublic schools that were eligible to participate in the Aid to Non-Public Schools R00A03.04 (for the purchase of textbooks or computer hardware and software for loans to students in eligible nonpublic schools) during the preceding school year or nonpublic schools that serve students with disabilities through the Non-Public Placement Program R00A02.07 Subprogram
- (D) Nonpublic schools participating in the Nonpublic School Safety Improvement Grant Program shall receive a maximum amount of \$65 per eligible nonpublic school student for participating schools, except that at schools where at least 20% of the students are eligible for the free or reduced-price meal program or for schools that service students with disabilities through the Non-Public Placement Program, there shall be a distribution of \$85 per student, and no individual school may receive less than \$5,000.