



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

January 23, 2025

HB 184

Nonpublic Schools – Transcripts – Prohibition on Punitive Measures Related to Student Debt

House Ways & Means Committee

Position: UNFAVORABLE

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in opposition to House Bill 184. 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 approximately 50,000 students served by over 150 PreK-12 Catholic schools in Maryland.

House Bill 184 would prohibit nonpublic schools from withholding transcripts from parents for unpaid tuition. Under this bill, where a parent has breached their legally binding tuition contract, a school may no longer condition the release of a transcript on payment in fulfillment of that legally binding contract, despite the parents having freely agreed to it.

Many nonpublic schools rely almost entirely on tuition to keep teachers paid, lights and heat on, and high-quality curriculum materials in the classrooms, just to name a few basic expenditures. Thus, nonpublic schools must form a contractual agreement with parents and guardians to ensure that there is recourse if tuition is not paid. Often times, part of that agreement is that transcripts may be withheld, so as to incentivize parents who might leave a nonpublic school community to ensure that financial agreement obligations are paid before moving on to another school. Oftentimes this is another private school, where they will yet again enter into the same willing agreement yet again.

As there are 138,000+ nonpublic school students in Maryland, this legislation is likely to result in an increased strain on Maryland courts by forcing schools to initiate collections actions and litigation. Currently, the ability to withhold transcripts often results in payment or settlement agreements, thus peaceably resolving the situation. **The state should not impede free, fair and willing contractual obligations entered into by its citizens.** It is for these reasons that we urge an unfavorable report on House Bill 184.