



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

March 5th 2026

HB1294

Criminal Law - Child Sexual Abuse Material - Artificial Intelligence Software
Judiciary Committee
Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of **House Bill 1294**. The Maryland 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.

House Bill 1294 updates Maryland's criminal law to address emerging threats posed by artificial intelligence. This bill modernizes statutory language by replacing the term "child pornography" with the more accurate and survivor-centered term "child sexual abuse material," and ensures that computer-generated images—including those created with artificial intelligence—are explicitly covered under the law. The intent of this bill is to close dangerous loopholes, protect vulnerable children, and ensure that technology cannot be weaponized to exploit or harm minors.

Children deserve the full protection of the law regardless of whether abusive imagery is created from real photographs or generated through sophisticated software. AI-generated images can be just as damaging—spreading rapidly online, creating lifelong trauma, and fueling markets that normalize exploitation. Communities benefit when offenders can be held accountable and when Maryland's legal framework stays ahead of technological advances that pose real dangers. Law enforcement also gains clearer tools to investigate and prosecute crimes involving digitally manipulated content, ensuring no exploitative act escapes justice simply because it was created by a machine.

Catholic social teaching compels us to protect the most vulnerable, particularly children, whose innocence and dignity must be safeguarded without compromise. Technology must always serve humanity, not undermine it. Just as the Maryland Bishops highlight in their pastoral letter on artificial intelligence, *The Face of Christ in a Digital Age*, they emphasize the critical truth that "AI must never be used to deepen digital colonialism, surveil vulnerable populations, or create weapons of oppression." Permitting AI to be used as a means of simulating abuse erodes societal values, dehumanizes children, and contributes to a culture that tolerates exploitation. Passing this legislation sends a powerful message that Maryland will not allow modern digital tools to become vehicles for moral harm.

For these reasons, the Maryland Catholic Conference urges a favorable report on **House Bill 1294**.