



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 11, 2026

HB 297

**Adult Education - High School Diploma Pathways - GED Option Pilot Program
and MDiplomaWorks Pathway**

House Ways & Means Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of House Bill 297. 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.

House Bill 297 would provide alternative pathways to a high school diploma in two ways. The first is through a pilot program that expands the current GED Option Program to students beyond English language learners who are at significant risk of not completing high school. The pilot program will enroll 150 students from each LEA with a view toward permanent expansion pending the success of the pilot program. The second is through alternative pathways to a high school diploma through the creation of the MDiplomaWorks Pathway. The pathway program will recognize and certify high school diploma achievement through demonstrated academic and career competencies. The program will offer an opportunity to earn a GED through demonstrated formal assessments, credentials, career and technical training or on-the-job experience.

The Conference supports legislation that promotes opportunity for all Marylanders within the inherent intersection of education and the dignity of work. In his encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, Pope St. John Paul II stated, "Work is a good thing for man-a good thing for his humanity-because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfilment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes 'more a human being'". By creating the MDiplomaWorks pathway, which awards credit for industry-recognized credentials and on-the-job learning, Maryland acknowledges the profound dignity found in various labor backgrounds as a pathway to achieve GED equivalency. Obtaining a GED in turn ensures that laborers will never be denied opportunities due to a lack a formal high school degree or the equivalent.

Providing otherwise marginalized students and adults with a specialized pathway to graduation before they withdraw from school or, alternatively, after they have gained commensurate experience and achievement in the labor force as adults, ensures they remain tethered to support systems and are better equipped in workforce or postsecondary education.

For these reasons, the Conference respectfully urges a favorable report on House Bill 297.