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**February 5, 2020**

**SB 207**

**Unaccompanied Minors in Need of Shelter and Supportive Services**

**Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee**

**Position: Support**

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 207. The Conference represents the public-policy interests of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington and the Diocese of Wilmington, which together encompass over one million Marylanders.

Senate Bill 207 would protect an “unaccompanied minor in need of shelter” and define such persons in state law as a minor not in custody of a parent or guardian, lacking regular residence, or whose circumstances indicate a significant danger of experiencing homelessness in the near future. In order to prevent homelessness, the bill authorizes public or private nonprofit providers to register with and partner with the state in providing shelter and other supportive services to unaccompanied minors in need of shelter, such as education and employment.

As the largest provider of social services outside of our state government, preventing the cycle of homelessness before it begins is something the Church partners with our state in prioritizing, particularly when it comes to the most vulnerable among its citizens. Pope Francis has implored, “I call on everyone: individuals, organs of society, authorities, to do everything possible to assure that every family has a place to live.” (*Papal Audience, St. Peter’s Square, 12/22/13*) As the “lack of housing, an extremely serious problem in itself, should be seen as a sign and summing-up of a whole series of shortcomings: economic, social, cultural or simply human in nature,” we should strive as a state to ensure such shortcomings do not, at the very least, befall unaccompanied youth. (*St. John Paul II, Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, 17*)

Senate Bill 207 seeks to provide a vehicle for our state and nonprofits to provide care for and nurturing of unaccompanied youth, who often have no support system. This bill enables the state and its nonprofit and community partners to ensure that unaccompanied youth have somewhere to turn in their time of need, particularly one of the most basic human needs: shelter. It is for these reasons that we urge a favorable report for Senate Bill 207.