



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

February 18, 2020

SB 798

Education - Juvenile Services Education System - Establishment, Powers, and Duties

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 798. The Catholic Conference represents the public policy interests of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, including the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington and the Diocese of Wilmington, which together encompass over one million Marylanders.

Senate Bill 798 would allow for the formation of an independent school board for youth housed in Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) facilities. The bill would also establish and mandate funding for a Juvenile Services Education System.

In its pastoral statement "*Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*" (USCCB, 2000), the United States conference of Catholic Bishops cited the "absence of educational opportunities" among considerations "contributing to a high rate of recidivism". The USCCB also cited "education" as one of the key "necessities that enable inmates to live in dignity".

The Maryland Catholic Conference has routinely supported recent measures by our state legislature to strengthen protections for detained youth in recent years, signaling a movement in the right direction. In the same vein, our state must be vigilant about the vulnerability of youth who are held in juvenile facilities. Several questions have arisen in recent years regarding the sufficiency and efficacy of education programs in our juvenile facilities. Senate Bill 798 is a necessary step toward ensuring that system-involved youth are provided with adequate educational opportunities and academic continuity.

The Church maintains that systems of incarceration should be centered on *restorative* justice. With regard to youthful offenders, our state's duty to ensure the same is significantly amplified. When youth are denied their constitutionally-guaranteed right to an education, their chances to break free from their often-challenging circumstances and live productive, fruitful adulthoods are greatly diminished. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 798.