



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

January 22, 2020

SB 153

Criminal Law – Abuse or Neglect of a Vulnerable Adult – Causing Severe Emotional Distress

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic Conference (“Conference”) represents the public policy interests of the three Roman Catholic (arch)dioceses serving Maryland: the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington, which together encompass over one million Marylanders.

Senate Bill 153 expands the definition of “abuse” to include “severe emotional distress [of a vulnerable adult] resulting from a court of conduct by another.”

While the effects of psychological abuse are not always visible, this use of verbal or other such conduct is intentional, cruel, and malicious; and can be just as hurtful as physical abuse, causing severe depression or emotional distress, fear, anxiety, confusion, and humiliation to the victim. Psychological abuse is believed to be the most common of all types of abuse to vulnerable adults and is the most difficult form of abuse to detect because it lacks clear evidence and concrete assessment criteria.

As defined in Criminal Law, Section 3-604, “vulnerable adults lack the physical or mental capacity to provide for the adult’s daily needs,” leaving their well-being in the hands of a caregiver, a parent, or other person who has permanent or temporary responsibility of their supervision. Adults with physical, mental, or emotional disabilities are more vulnerable than other adults because they are not as independent, posing a higher risk of being abused by others.

Everyone has the right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect. The Conference supports legislation that aims to protect our most vulnerable populations and believes that every individual, no matter how young or old, deserves to be treated with dignity and respect reflecting the basic premise of human rights and equality.

For these reasons, the Conference respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 153.