



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

**January 29, 2020**

**SB 161**

**Crimes - Hate Crimes - Use of an Item or a Symbol to Threaten or Intimidate**

**Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee**

**Position: Support**

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 161. 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 161 would criminalize unauthorized acts of placing or inscribing a symbol intended to threaten or intimidate any person or group on another's property. This would include, but not be limited to, a noose or swastika. Maryland's hate crime statutes seek to protect a broad array of individual citizens, groups, and their property, including that of religious entities, from hate crimes. It is only prudent for the state to add protections for those who would be subject to acts of hate through threat and/or intimidation through the use of traditionally or historically threatening symbols such as swastikas or nooses.

In response to recent increases in hate crime activity in our society, the Church, both in Maryland and nationally, has created committees to address racism and hate, spur dialogue, and develop action plans to address the issue. Moreover, Pope Francis has stated that the "problem of intolerance must be confronted in all its forms: wherever any minority is persecuted and marginalized because of its religious convictions or ethnic identity, the wellbeing of society as a whole is endangered and each one of us must feel affected." (*Pope Francis, Address to a Delegation from the Simon Wiesenthal Center, 2013*) We believe that more needs to be done and, thus, Senate Bill 161 is a welcome measure.

While the Conference does not generally support measures to increase legal penalties, we believe the reasonable penalties offered by Senate Bill 161 to be a deterrent to those seeking to threaten or intimidate others. Through this bill, Marylanders would assert that threats of harm or intimidation by the derogatory and inflammatory means prescribed are inimical to the peace and fraternity that we should all strive for in our diverse state.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 161.