



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

February 18, 2020

HB 658

Local Correctional Facilities – Requirement for Prerelease Program

House Judiciary 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.

House Bill 658 requires counties to establish, if necessary, or continue prerelease programs for incarcerated individuals prior to their reentry back into society, to include programs on job training and drug and mental health treatment.

It is imperative that all men and women have appropriate access to prerelease services to be able to successfully reenter their communities. Factors such as family reintegration, job or vocational training, and affordable housing are crucial to a person’s productive return, replacing the isolation of confinement with more positive supports. The combination of such factors ultimately leads to lower recidivism rates and better involvement in a person’s family and community life.

The Church continually supports efforts to make restorative justice the focus of the incarceration system, including prior to the release of the person back into society. Pope Francis has affirmed this need in stating that “[i]t is necessary to do justice, but true justice is not satisfied by simply punishing criminals. It is essential to go further and do everything possible to reform, improve and educate the person, so that he matures from every point of view, does not become discouraged, addresses the damage he caused, and can reestablish his life without being crushed under the weight of his hardships.”

While the Conference supports more and better use of prerelease programs, it also urges that these centers be placed throughout the state in areas that are near and easily accessible for those returning home, so that they may begin to readjust to life back in their own communities.

The Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 658.