



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

**January 27, 2021**

**SB 317**

**Office of the Attorney General - Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Coordinator**

**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.

Senate Bill 317 establishes that certain individuals have a right to legal representation in certain immigration proceedings; establishing the Right to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Coordinator in the Office of the Attorney General to manage services and resources in order to provide all covered individuals with access to certain legal representation; requiring the Coordinator to designate appropriate community groups to provide outreach and education services to individuals and communities impacted by immigration detention

The foundation of Catholic Social Teaching is the recognition of the life and dignity of the human person. The Church’s care of and concern for immigrants directly flows out of our belief that every immigrant is endowed with God given dignity and ought to be treated with love and respect. In fact, *“The Church supports the human rights of all people and offers them pastoral care, education, and social services, no matter what the circumstances of entry into this country, and it works for the respect of the human dignity of all especially those who find themselves in desperate circumstances”* (2000, *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity, A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops*).

Our legal system rests upon the principle that everyone is entitled to due process of law and a meaningful opportunity to be heard. But for far too long, the immigration system has failed to provide noncitizens with a system of justice that lives up to this standard. Thus, Senate Bill 317 will provide essential legal representation for our most vulnerable population in pursuit of a common good within our society.

The Conference appreciates your consideration and urges a favorable report for Senate Bill 317.