



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

February 3, 2021

HB 216

Higher Education - Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients and Homeless Youth - Alterations and Reports

House Appropriations Committee

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 216. The Conference represents the public policy interests of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington and the Diocese of Wilmington, which together encompass over one million Marylanders.

House Bill 216 makes alterations to the State provision of tuition waivers for foster care recipients and homeless youth. The bill would expand access to the program for homeless youth and provide continuity of learning for students in that category, even if they transfer to another institution. Additionally, it would require public higher education institutions to prioritize housing for foster care recipients and homeless youth.

As the Church values the dignity of human life above all else, we must do all we can to remedy homelessness through promoting “education, access to health care, and above all employment, for it is through free, creative, participatory and mutually supportive labor that human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives.” (*Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, 192*). It is thus imperative that our state provide homeless youth the opportunity to obtain a college degree, thus affording them the ability to obtain gainful employment and provide for themselves a place to call “home” of their own. It is of parallel importance to ensure that Maryland provides such opportunities for foster care recipients entrusted to the State’s care.

Homeless youth and foster care recipients are often be left to care for themselves upon reaching college age. The State’s provision of tuition waivers is a primary way for these children to have hope for a better future. Therefore, we urge this Committee to support anything to improve or expand upon this program and urge a favorable report on House Bill 216.