



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

March 11, 2021

HB 1113

Primary and Secondary Education - Education Savings Account Program – Established

House Appropriations Committee

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 1113. 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. We offer this testimony on behalf of the families of approximately 50,000 students served by over 150 PreK-12 Catholic schools in Maryland.

House Bill 1113 seeks to expand educational options for lower and middle-income Maryland students through the provision of education savings accounts. Accounts, funded by the state, can be used for tuition for new educational opportunities, such as attendance at a nonpublic school of their parents choosing.

Dues to rising costs, there has been significant decrease in nonpublic school enrollment over the last decade due to affordability concerns, as schools seek to provide adequate pay for their certified teachers, maintain high-quality academic programs and meeting maintenance and utility costs, often on much smaller budgets than their public-school counterparts. This decline has shifted a costly enrollment burden onto Maryland's public schools. This bill could help to stabilize many schools that serve as pillars of their local communities and neighborhoods, along with their public-school counterparts.

However, through expanding options, this program could act to ease the burden on the state's public schools. Affording parents and students expanded educational options can help to alleviate some of the overcrowding in our public schools. Increasing nonpublic enrollments through options for lower-income students will also improve the stability of the state's nonpublic schools, thus acting to preserve or increase the \$1.5 *billion* saved by taxpayers *every year* due to their presence in the educational landscape as a vital complement to its public schools.

It is also important to note that, through this program, no money is given directly to nonpublic schools, but rather directly to parents. The state owes a duty to ensure all of Maryland's children are afforded the educational opportunities best suited to their needs. Moreover, the duty is heightened when it comes to providing those options, and a corresponding pathway out of poverty, for lower-income students. This program would be one important step in fulfilling those duties. It is for these reasons that the Maryland Catholic Conference urges a favorable report for House Bill 1113.