



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

March 30, 2021

HB 1245

Guaranteed Access Grant and Next Generation Scholars of Maryland – Alterations

Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 1245. 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 1245 would provide for the continuation of the Next Generation Scholars Program, a program supported by the Conference when rebranded in 2016. The Program provides grants to nonprofit organizations to promote higher education and college and career awareness. Additionally, the Guaranteed Access Grant Program provides eligible 7th and 8th grade students access to such programs and services that assist with formulating high school and college graduation plans, summer internships, career interest assessments, mentoring and college campus visits. Both public and nonpublic school students are eligible to participate in the Guaranteed Access Grant Program, so long as they meet the requirements.

The Catholic Conference supports wholeheartedly any effort to assist low-income students, who are often among the most marginalized in terms of access to quality education. The Conference maintains that our state should do all that it can to promote successful educational outcomes for children who might otherwise be deprived of the same opportunities as wealthier children. Access to a quality education leads to gainful employment, thus breaking the cycle of poverty plaguing many low-income communities. Pope Francis has stated that the Church should highly value education, leading to gainful employment, as it is through the same that “human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives.” (*Evangeliu Gaudium*, 192).

States should do all that they can to level the playing fields across income levels regarding access to education. It is in the best interest for the future of our state to ensure that low-income students can break the cycle of poverty and have access to the endless possibilities that a quality education can provide. Therefore, we urge this Committee to report favorably on House Bill 1245.