



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

March 3, 2021

SB 827

Nonpublic Schools - Adequate Health Services - Eligibility for Reimbursement

Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 827. The Catholic Conference represents the public-policy interests of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, including the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington and the Diocese of Wilmington, which together encompass over one million Marylanders.

Senate Bill 827 would afford a nonpublic school the ability to seek 50% reimbursement for health services costs for their students from the county in which the school is located. Reimbursement eligibility would be limited to schools that do not charge a higher tuition than the state public school per pupil average, which dictates the cost of educating students in public schools. Additionally, reimbursement would come through county budgets, at no cost to the state from general fund expenditures that fund public schools. This legislation makes participation optional for nonpublic schools, so no mandate is placed upon their participation.

The coronavirus pandemic has only highlighted an existing need for school nursing services in our Catholic schools. There were already a significant number of lower-income Catholic schools throughout the state that could not afford to have full-time nurses on staff. Financial constraints have impacted schools and students, and four Maryland Catholic schools have already closed their doors this year. Lower and middle-income nonpublic schools often charge one-half, or even one-third, of the tuition equivalent of the state per pupil average cost for public schools. Thus, their operating income often leaves them on small budgets. The ability to seek reimbursement for student health services would provide a much-needed benefit to students, particularly those who are low-income and minority.

Statewide, there are hundreds of Catholic and other nonpublic schools, educating nearly 100,000 students. This bill stands to impact around 80% of those students, who do not attend a high-tuition school. Maryland's Catholic schools educate tens of thousands of lower and middle-income families every year, and we offer our support for Senate Bill 827 as a means of assisting those families. Thus, we urge a favorable report for Senate Bill 827.