



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

January 26, 2021

House Bill 209
Public Health – Maryland Suicide Fatality Review Committee

House Health and Government Operations Committee

Position: SUPPORT

The Maryland Catholic 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 209 establishes a Maryland Suicide Fatality Review Committee to include appropriate members of government agencies and experts in suicidology, health care, suicide prevention, mental illness advocacy, substance abuse treatment, law enforcement, and others. The Committee will determine trends, risk factors, and best practices for prevention of suicide and disseminate their findings while maintaining the confidentiality of the deceased in their reports.

Suicide fatalities are a public health crisis in Maryland, increasing steadily over the last two decades and its effects devastate families and communities. Elderly Marylanders have the highest rate of suicide in the state, and suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death for young people in Maryland ages 15-34 (*American Foundation for Suicide Prevention*). Suicidal ideation and deaths of despair have also increased during the COVID-19 pandemic as people suffer lack of human connection, loneliness, financial losses, depression, anxiety, and grief.

The Maryland Catholic Conference supports HB 209 because of Catholics' longstanding service in health care and counseling and because suicide prevention represents our commitment to the dignity of every human life. Our faith teaches each person is made in God's image and likeness. Any person experiencing mental illness or suicidal thoughts deserves compassionate care and healing to rediscover their intrinsic value and worth.

It is for these reasons that the Maryland Catholic Conference respectfully urges a favorable report for **House Bill 209**. Thank you for your consideration.