



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

February 15, 2021

**HB 956
Law Enforcement Officers - Use of Force**

House Judiciary Committee

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic Conference (“Conference”) represents the public policy interests of the three Roman Catholic (arch) dioceses serving Maryland: the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington.

House Bill 956 seeks to limit the use of excessive or unreasonable force by law enforcement, unless warranted by certain exceptions or conditions. The bill prohibits a police officer from using a certain type of restraint, subject to a certain exception; requiring a certain police officer to make a certain attempt to intervene, to terminate, or to prevent a certain other officer’s use of a certain type of restraint under certain circumstances.

In June of 2020, a letter was jointly submitted to all members of Congress by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) Chairmen of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, the Committee on Migration, and the Ad Hoc Committee against Racism, offering reflections and principles for police accountability and reform. Therein, the Chairmen, which included Maryland-serving Bishop Mario Dorsonville-Rodriguez, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Washington, stated that there “*must be better practices for formation and accountability for police, certainly in the use of lethal force, but also in patterns of discrimination and prejudice, so that real accountability can happen before more lives are lost.*”

The Catholic Church roots much of its social justice teaching in the inherent dignity of every human person. The use of excessive force by officers, particularly as has been exhibited against African-American men and women in number or situations nationwide, stands in stark contrast to that inherent dignity. It is for this reason that we support the intent of House Bill 139. Specifically, the Bishops noted in the letter to Congress that we “*must make progress in the use of force by the police and other law enforcement officers.*” They further noted that Pope Francis has maintained that the use of force by police officers should never degenerate into violence. Likewise, we support House Bill 956 as a reasonable means for deescalating the use of force by police officers, while striking a balance in allowing for a rebuttable presumption to delineate instances where such force was in fact a last resort.

The Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 956.