



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

April 1, 2021

SB 497

Juvenile Services Education System - Establishment, Powers, and Duties

**House Judiciary Committee
House Ways & Means Committee**

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 497. 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 497 would allow for the formation of a Juvenile Services Education Board within the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) facilities. The bill would establish a Juvenile Services Education Board within the Department to ensure collaboration and input from other officials with expertise in education, such as the state Secretary of Higher Education and State Superintendent of Schools. Provisions would be further established to guide the board in ensuring criteria is met for educational continuity and best outcomes for system-involved youth.

In its pastoral statement *“Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice”* (USCCB, 2000), the United States conference of Catholic Bishops cited the “absence of educational opportunities” among considerations “contributing to a high rate of recidivism”. The USCCB also cited “education” as one of the key “necessities that enable inmates to live in dignity”.

The Maryland Catholic Conference has routinely supported recent measures by our state legislature to strengthen protections for detained youth in recent years, signaling a movement in the right direction. In the same vein, our state must be vigilant about the vulnerability of youth who are held in juvenile facilities. Several questions have arisen in recent years regarding the sufficiency and efficacy of education programs in our juvenile facilities. Senate Bill 497 is a necessary step toward ensuring that system-involved youth are provided with adequate educational opportunities and academic continuity.

The Church maintains that systems of incarceration should be centered on *restorative* justice. With regard to youthful offenders, our state’s duty to ensure the same is significantly amplified. When youth are denied their constitutionally-guaranteed right to an education, their chances to break free from their often-challenging circumstances and live productive, fruitful adulthoods are greatly diminished. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 497.