



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

**February 23, 2021**

**HB 851  
Corrections - Restrictive Housing - Serious Mental Illness**

**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 851 bans the use of restrictive housing for incarcerated individuals with serious mental illness, as defined in the bill, with limited exceptions. If such an individual is placed in restrictive housing, it may not be for more than fifteen days and requires extra precautions and procedures, such as daily physical and mental health assessments and the use of de-escalation techniques.

Pope Francis has equated punishment involving external isolation to a form of “torture.” He denoted that states should not be “*allowed, juridical or in fact, to subordinate respect for the dignity of the human person to any other purpose, even should it serve some sort of social utility.*” (*Address of Pope Francis to the Delegates of the International Association of Penal Law, October, 2014*)

The Church upholds that systems of criminal justice should seek both justice and mercy, with an emphasis upon restoration of communities, victims and offenders as a whole. Restrictive housing is a means toward none of these ends and is a regressive policy. It is thus important that the State of Maryland, at the very least, seriously limit its usage. Regardless of their offense, prisoners are exposed to the perils of incarceration for the crimes they’ve committed. Solitary confinement only compiles these perils and limits their hope for rehabilitation. Simply the relative isolation of confinement is enough to aggravate existing mental health issues.

The Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 851.