



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

February 17, 2021

SBB 588

**Law Enforcement Officers - Creditability of Witnesses and Misconduct Database
(Maryland Police Accountability Act of 2021)**

Senate Judicial Proceeding 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.

Senate Bill 588 requires the state’s attorney for each Maryland County to maintain a database of law enforcement officers who have committed acts of dishonestly or exhibited questionable integrity which rise to the level of constituting exculpatory or impeachment evidence in a criminal case. The bill would also require maintenance of a database for formal complaints filed against police officers. The records would be subject to public inspection. The database would be maintained by Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission.

In June of this year, 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, acknowledged that police “*operating under high standards perform a valuable service for the promotion of the common good in society.*” In recanting the words of Pope Benedict XVI, the letter reinforced that “*a just society needs order and a respect for the rule of law to achieve a peaceful and tranquil coexistence in society.*”

While there are many good, honest policemen and policewomen who risk their lives every day to protect citizens, there are bad actors who violate the public trust. Therefore, it is necessary to have mechanisms in place to acknowledge and memorialize complaints against potential bad actors.

Senate Bill 588 is much akin to laws passed two years ago regarding teacher background checks in Maryland schools, enthusiastically supported by the Conference. Just as in law enforcement, there are many excellent, upstanding teachers in Maryland schools. However, some violate the integrity of the profession and dignity of their students through misconduct. Just as our law

acknowledges this and attempts to protect our students from violate teachers, our law should seek to protect the public from violate police.

The Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 588.