



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

**February 12, 2021**

**HB 854**

**Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center - Inclusion of Out-of-Home Placement Data**

**House Ways & Means Committee**

**Position: Support**

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of House Bill 854. 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.

House Bill 854 would implement new requirements for data collection for out-of-home-care placement (foster youth) in the Maryland Longitudinal Data System. Data points would include educational placement and financial support metrics.

House bill 854 would promote a clearer picture of educational opportunities and outcomes for foster care youth. This would allow the State of Maryland to subsequently develop policies that best serve foster care youth with regard to educational outcomes, educational debt burden, and, ultimately, economic independence and security.

Pope Francis has routinely stressed the importance of providing such opportunities for those of limited means, which includes “education, ...and above all employment, for it is through free, creative, participatory and mutually supportive labor that human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives.” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 192). Provision of educational opportunities for foster care youth is especially important, for those in the foster system often do not have the support of a family unit to help see them through the process of obtaining an education, which is indubitably the pathway for such vulnerable youth to ensure they do not experience poverty, joblessness, or food insecurity in their adult lives. As it is the responsibility of our communities, including the State of Maryland, to ensure those in out-of-home placement are given opportunities, this bill is a well-intentioned and important step.

The Maryland Catholic Conference respectfully request this committee to vote favorably on House Bill 854.