

**HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
HOUSE BILL 443  
MARYLAND CORPS PROGRAM - REVISIONS**

February 8, 2022

**Support**

Catholic Charities of Baltimore strongly supports HB 443 which would revise and strengthen the Maryland Corps Program.

Inspired by the Gospel mandates to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. As the largest human service provider in Maryland working with tens of thousands of youth, individuals, and families each year, we recognize the importance of service and introducing others to careers in service.

For over 20 years, Catholic Charities operated Project SERVE, a post-graduate year of service. SERVE volunteers were provided housing and a stipend in exchange for a year of service in one of our programs. In addition to providing extra support to our programs for the year, between 20-25% of participants became full-time colleagues at Catholic Charities following their year of service.

Unfortunately, we were forced to end the program. For the past five years, recruitment numbers have been down for post-graduate service programs across the country. The downturn has been particularly hard on small programs like Project SERVE who could not accommodate the decline and had to close. The main reason for the drop in applicants is the financial burden associated with a year of service. In general, the financial and wraparound benefits of this program would help non-profits, including Catholic Charities, to attract year-of-service volunteers once again by offering incentives that are out of reach for individual non-profits to offer.

The education award is a critical incentive because it helps participants pay for further schooling or pay back existing student loans. Project SERVE lost out on many applicants when we were no longer able to offer an education award. Applicants would either choose programs that did provide an award or they went straight into the workforce to earn money. The financial burden and pressure to afford graduate school is a discourages applicants from committing to a year of service. At recruiting events, it was common to hear applicants express a fear that a year of service was going to interfere with their long-term education and career development goals.

The in-state tuition eligibility provided in this bill is an incentive that would make a year of service feel more manageable for those who do want to further their education. We are not aware of another program that offers this kind of benefit.

Finally, the bill provides for \$15/hr *plus* the addition of other wraparound services like childcare, housing, transportation, and mental health services. Not only does this recognize the value of the services being offered by the participant, but it makes it more likely that individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds can participate.

**For the reasons stated above, we urge you to issue a favorable report on HB 443.**

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Submitted by: Regan Vaughan, Director of Advocacy