



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

February 9, 2022

SB 401

Operating Budget - Funding - Scholarships for Nonpublic School Students

Senate Budget & Taxation Committee

Position: SUPPORT

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 401. The Conference represents the interests of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington and the Diocese of Wilmington, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. We offer this testimony on behalf of the large number of low-income families attending Catholic schools statewide who receive BOOST scholarship assistance and the thousands of parents in the years to come who will want to utilize the diverse education options provided through BOOST scholarships.

The BOOST Scholarship Program has provided expanded educational options for low-income Maryland K-12 students through the provision of scholarship assistance in the Maryland budget since 2016. One hundred percent of scholarship recipients are eligible for the Free and Reduced-Price Meal Program (FARMS). Scholarship recipients are certified as eligible through the State Department of Education (MSDE). This bill would continue to provide scholarship assistance to 100% low-income FARMS-eligible students. It includes modest increases in funding over the next four years.

BOOST has provided over 15,000 scholarships, the majority of which have been awarded to minority recipients. In addition to the racial and grade-level diversity of boost students, there were approximately 950 student-recipients who were English Language Learners (ELLs) last year. Thus, BOOST is helping to break the cycle of poverty for minority students whose parents choose a Catholic school using a BOOST Scholarship, as an average of 98% of students who graduate at a Maryland Catholic school go on to graduate and attend college. BOOST is also enhancing the education of students with disabilities, with double scholarship awards going to students with special needs.

BOOST has had broad geographic appeal since its inception. Last school year, BOOST scholarship recipients hailed from 21 of the 24 Maryland jurisdictions, although

the vast majority are low-income students from Maryland's four largest jurisdictions, Baltimore City and Montgomery, Prince George's and Baltimore Counties.

In all, the BOOST Scholarship Program has helped to make Catholic schools an option for so many families. The majority of BOOST scholarships and scholarship dollars are awarded to students whose parents chose a Catholic school this year, many having transferred from a public school. The scholarship recipient demographic data cited above mirrors that of our school families in many Catholic schools, which welcome large numbers of low-income, immigrant and first-generation, minority, and non-Catholic students.

The BOOST Scholarship Program has acted as an integral supplemental source of assistance to low-income Catholic school families, fostering a partnership between Catholic schools and the State of Maryland.

Our Catholic schools remain committed to working alongside the State of Maryland in providing options for low-income students. It is for these reasons, on behalf of the families empowered by BOOST scholarships to choose Catholic schools, that we urge the Maryland General Assembly to secure BOOST funding well into the future through Senate Bill 401.