



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

**February 23, 2022**

**HB 596**

**Constitutional Amendment - Environmental Rights**

**House Environment & Transportation 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 596 proposes an amendment to the Constitution of Maryland to establish that every person has the fundamental and inalienable right to a healthful and sustainable environment; and requiring the State to serve as the trustee of the State's natural resources, including the air, land, water, wildlife, and ecosystems of the State, and to conserve, protect, and enhance the State's natural resources for the benefit of every person, including present and future generations.

As Pope Francis has written, climate change “*represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day*” (*Laudato Si’*, no. 25), threatening the wellbeing of peoples and the environment. Catholic social teaching envisions a sustainable and authentic human development, where technological solutions respect the principle of integral ecology and take into account social, economic and ecological considerations.

House Bill 596 echoes key themes in Catholic social teachings and is in harmony with various elements of Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato Si’*: On Care for Our Common Home (LS). Its emphasis on an “inalienable right” to a healthy environment fits squarely with Catholic social teaching on the dignity of the human person and our responsibilities for future generations. Its description of “natural resources for the benefit of every person” echoes the Church's teaching that the “gifts of the earth belong to everyone” (LS, p. 71). Likewise, the Amendment addresses the important issue of accountability (LS, p. 61) by ensuring that matters of environmental justice can be addressed by all of Maryland’s diverse citizenry.

The Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 596.