



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

February 15, 2022

**SB 554
Maryland New Start Act of 2022**

House Ways & Means 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 554 establishes Maryland New Start Pilot Program in the Department of Commerce to provide certain grants to organizations to create or support certain entrepreneurship development programs to provide assistance to formerly imprisoned individuals and to provide loans to certain individuals participating in those programs; establishing the Maryland New Start Pilot Program Fund as a special, non-lapsing fund.

In remarks at his recent weekly public audience, Pope Francis told the faithful that “we risk being imprisoned in a justice that doesn’t allow one to easily get back up again and confuses redemption with punishment. For this, I want to recall today in a particular way our brothers and our sisters who are in prison...its right that those who have made a mistake pay for their mistake, but it’s even more right that those who have done wrong should be able to redeem oneself from their mistake. There can’t be sentences without windows of hope.”

The Church upholds that systems of restorative justice should seek both justice and mercy, with an emphasis upon restoration of communities, victims and offenders as a whole. The Maryland New Start Pilot Program is a restorative justice measure and the Church maintains that systems of incarceration should always be centered on restorative justice. When inmates are incentivized with entrepreneurship development programs their chances to break free from their often-challenging circumstances and live productive lives post-release are exponentially enhanced.

The Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 554.