



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

January 27, 2022

**House Bill 161
Criminal Law – Exploitation of Vulnerable Adult or Elderly Individual –
Undue Influence**

House Judiciary Committee

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic 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, which together encompass over one million Marylanders.

House Bill 161 protects older and vulnerable adults from financial exploitation and abuse. It would redefine the term of “undue influence” and ensure courts consider the circumstances that might make an aging or disabled adult vulnerable to financial coercion.

Vulnerability can increase as we age. Diminished physical or mental capacity, illness, disability, isolation, and other factors leave aging adults dependent on family members and caregivers for their well-being, which may place older adults at increased risk of being coerced or forced to hand over their property and assets.

According to the National Council on Aging, “approximately 1 in 10 Americans aged 60+ have experienced some form of elder abuse. Some estimates range as high as 5 million elders who are abused each year.”

Everyone has the right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect. The Conference supports legislation that aims to protect our most vulnerable populations and believes that every individual, no matter how young or old, deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. For these reasons, the Conference urges a favorable report on **HB 161**.