



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

**February 03, 2022**

**SB 129**

**Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program**

**Senate Judicial Proceedings 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 129 establishes the Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Program administered by the Maryland Legal Services Corporation to provide access to legal representation to certain individuals in certain immigration proceedings and education and outreach to certain individuals, families, and communities affected by immigration proceedings and detention; establishing the Access to Counsel in Immigration Proceedings Special Fund as a special, non-lapsing fund; requiring interest earnings of the Fund to be credited to the Fund.

The foundation of Catholic Social Teaching is the recognition of the life and dignity of the human person. The Church’s care of and concern for immigrants directly flows out of our belief that every immigrant is endowed with God given dignity and ought to be treated with love and respect. In fact, *“The Church supports the human rights of all people and offers them pastoral care, education, and social services, no matter what the circumstances of entry into this country, and it works for the respect of the human dignity of all especially those who find themselves in desperate circumstances”* (2000, *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity, A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops*).

Our legal system rests upon the principle that everyone is entitled to due process of law and a meaningful opportunity to be heard. But for far too long, the immigration system has failed to provide noncitizens with a system of justice that lives up to this standard. Thus, Senate Bill 129 will provide essential legal representation for our most vulnerable population in pursuit of a common good within our society.

The Conference appreciates your consideration, and urges a favorable report for Senate Bill 129.