



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

March 8, 2022

**HB 1299
Corrections - Housing - Serious Mental Illness**

House Judiciary 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 1299 requires that certain inmates with a certain serious mental illness to be offered a certain amount of time outside a certain locked room or cell during a certain time period, with certain exceptions; requiring the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to report certain information to the General Assembly on or before certain dates; and generally relating to inmates with a serious mental illness.

Pope Francis has equated punishment involving external isolation to a form of “torture.” He denoted that states should not be “*allowed, juridical or in fact, to subordinate respect for the dignity of the human person to any other purpose, even should it serve some sort of social utility.*” (*Address of Pope Francis to the Delegates of the International Association of Penal Law, October, 2014*)

The Church upholds that systems of criminal justice should seek both justice and mercy, with an emphasis upon restoration of communities, victims and offenders as a whole. Restrictive housing is a means toward none of these ends and is a regressive policy. It is thus important that the State of Maryland, at the very least, seriously limit its usage. Regardless of their offense, prisoners are exposed to the perils of incarceration for the crimes they’ve committed. Simply the relative isolation is enough to aggravate existing mental health issues.

The Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 1299.