



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

February 22, 2022

**HB 997
Criminal Procedure - Restorative Justice Program**

House Judiciary Committee

Position: Support

The Maryland Catholic Conference represents the public-policy interests of the three (arch) dioceses serving Maryland, including the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington and the Diocese of Wilmington, which together encompass over one million Marylanders.

House Bill 997 establishes the Restorative Justice Program within the Victim Services Unit of the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services; and establishes the position of Restorative Justice Legal Specialist, the Restorative Justice Program Revolving Fund, and the Maryland Restorative Justice Council.

A Catholic approach to restorative justice recognizes that the dignity of the human person applies to both victim and offender. Justice must include more than punishment. Without healing and restoration, a limited approach can leave victims of crime with feelings of neglect, abandonment and anger making reconciliation and healing difficult, if not impossible. Punishment alone cannot address complex social problems in communities, or effectively help end cycles of crime and violence. A restorative justice approach is more comprehensive and addresses the needs of victims, the community and those responsible for causing harm through healing, prevention, education, rehabilitation and community

For restorative justice to be effective, it must also address the systemic and structural barriers to healing such as racial and economic disparity, cycles of crime and incarceration and the breakdown of the family. Those returning to the community following incarceration face significant barriers such as homelessness, unemployment, poverty, substance abuse, emotional and psychological stress, and social isolation. Without the proper support to help them succeed, recidivism is likely to place the person in an almost endless cycle that impacts the community and the life and dignity of the offender.

The Church maintains that systems of justice, including incarceration, should be centered on *restorative* justice. In doing so, systems of justice provide for second chances, providing hope for those who are incarcerated. For these important reasons, we urge a favorable report on House Bill 997.