



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

March 8, 2022

HB 1245

Correctional Services – Inmates – Labor, Job Training, and Educational Courses

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 1245 would require the compensation rate for inmate labor in Maryland Correctional Enterprises to be not less than the federal minimum wage; requiring the Division of Correction to offer job training and educational courses to certain inmates; requiring the Maryland Department of Labor to evaluate the job training and educational courses offered by the Division on an ongoing basis; and generally relating to inmates.

Maryland’s Catholic bishops issued a statement on the Dignity of Work, in which they noted the Church’s historic commitment to the right of all people to fair compensation for their labor. As early as the late 19th century, Pope Leo XIII claimed this principle was, “*a dictate of natural justice more imperious and ancient than any bargain between man and man.*”

Additionally, the Conference firmly supports restorative justice practices. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has stated that “*People must be held accountable for their actions but justice and restoration must be the object of punishment which must have a constructive and reformatory purpose*” (*Restorative Justice: Healing and Transformation of Persons, Families and Communities*, USCCB, 2015).

House Bill 1245 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 a just wage, to obtain an education, or further their academic credentials, their chances to break free from their often-challenging circumstances and live productive lives post-release are exponentially enhanced. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on House Bill 1245.