



SB 874
Community Health and Safety Works
Grant Program and Fund - Establishment
Budget & Taxation Committee
March 7, 2023

Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports SB 874 which would establish the Community Health and Safety Works Grant Program in the Department of Housing and Community Development.

Inspired by the Gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. For 100 years, Catholic Charities has accompanied Marylanders as they age with dignity, obtain empowering careers, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve economic independence, prepare for educational success and feel welcome as immigrant neighbors. We recognize the need to deliver services in a safe environment.

Catholic Charities was recently a recipient of a Community Health and Safety Works Grant Program for the Cherry Hill Town Center (CHTC). Catholic Charities owns and operates a town center in the Cherry Hill neighborhood of Baltimore. CHTC is the commercial hub of the neighborhood containing a bank, Head Start classrooms, a library, community pharmacy, food vendors and other retail. Violent crime is persistent and pervasive in Cherry Hill, deeply harming residents and business in the neighborhood. According to the Baltimore Police Department, Cherry Hill has the highest percentage of police interactions among every single community in Baltimore City. A significant number of these traumatic events have taken place in or nearby CHTC, as unfortunately local gangs have chosen the shopping center as one of their main locations to conduct their illicit drug operations. The effect of this cyclic violence is felt by CHTC tenants and local residents. As the neighborhood's primary shopping area, residents and business owners should be able to run errands and go to work without jeopardizing their safety, which is not the current reality. We envision the CHTC as a neighborhood hub where residents can shop, eat, play, and connect with each other. But the cost of additional safety precautions was putting pressure on tenant rent so we applied to the Community Health and Safety Works Grant Program.

The grant funding we were recently awarded will allow us to increase the number of hours we have security on site. Additionally, we are in the process of upgrading our surveillance capabilities linking our system with the Baltimore City Police. These are enhancements we had long eyed but did not have the funding to implement. These improvements will benefit the businesses and organizations in CHTC, as well as the entire neighborhood. The Community Health and Safety Works Grant Program should be codified within the Department so that others can benefit from this vital funding.

For the reasons listed above, Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration, and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for SB 874

Submitted By: Regan Vaughan, Director of Advocacy