



MARYLAND  
CATHOLIC  
CONFERENCE

February 2, 2023

**SB 27**  
**Criminal Procedure - Restorative Justice Program**  
**Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee**

**Position: FAVORABLE**

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of Senate Bill 27. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

Senate Bill 27 establishes a "Restorative Justice Program" within the Victim Services Unit in the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services (GOCPYVS), funds the program, staffs the program with a restorative justice legal specialist and establishes the Maryland Restorative Justice Council within GOCPYVS.

Overall, while many details will be left to the work of the department, council and program staff, the parameters of this bill align wholeheartedly with that of Catholic social teaching on the end goal of the criminal justice system: restoration, community and support for all parties involved. 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*). Catholic doctrine provides that the criminal justice system should serve three principal purposes: (1) the preservation and protection of the common good of society, (2) the restoration of public order, and (3) the restoration or conversion of the offender.

Furthermore, in the pastoral statement *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice* (2000), the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops stated, "We call upon government to redirect the vast amount of public resources away from building more and more prisons and toward better and more effective programs aimed at crime prevention, rehabilitation, education efforts, substance abuse treatment, and programs of probation, parole and reintegration."

To those ends, Senate Bill 27 seeks to provide a framework for programming within the GOCPYVS that would promote a restorative paradigm surrounding the relationships between offenders and victims alike, whether in the adult criminal justice system or the youth justice system. It is for these reasons that we urge the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 27.