



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

March 14, 2023

HB 1243

Public Safety - Protecting Against Hate Crimes Grant Fund - Establishment

House Judiciary Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT for House Bill 1243. 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.

For the past few years, budgetary funding has been provided in varying annual amounts to implement security measures at houses of worship at risk of hate crimes. That program, currently administered through the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth and Victim Services, was funded at \$5 million in Fiscal Year 2023. Accordingly, the GOCPYVS already has procedures, forms and an application in place for this program.

House Bill 1243 would codify this fund and show that Maryland prioritizes protecting its communities against hate crimes. This funding is needed to protect places of worship, which are institutions central to Maryland communities. This funding serves a legitimate public interest in protecting citizens in places where they may be most vulnerable to attack.

During the 2021 reporting year, the Maryland State Police Hate Bias Report cited 388 hate bias incidents reported to law enforcement agencies in the State. The Church denounces such activity and supports commonsense measures to curb hate-motivated activity. Pope Francis has stated that the "problem of intolerance must be confronted in all its forms" and that where persons are "persecuted and marginalized because of [their] religious convictions or ethnic identity, the wellbeing of society as a whole is endangered and each one of us must feel affected." (Pope Francis, *Address to a Delegation from the Simon Wiesenthal Center*, 2013)

We applaud the effort by our state to protect its citizens in places where they are most vulnerable to hate crimes. It is our hope that the legislature will continue to provide much-needed funding for this initiative on a more permanent basis through this bill. Thus, we respectfully urge a favorable report for House Bill 1243.