



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 15, 2023

House Bill 461

**Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program - Human and Sex
Trafficking**

House Ways & Means Committee

Position: Favorable with Amendments

The Maryland 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.

House Bill 461 requires the State Board of Education, and certain nonpublic schools to develop and implement age-appropriate educational programming on awareness and prevention of human trafficking, sex trafficking, sexual abuse, and assault.

Promoting awareness about the realities of human trafficking and sex trafficking is essential in the fight to combat human trafficking. Maryland is uniquely positioned to be a "hot spot" for human trafficking activity, due to the interstate highways that run through it, its proximity to numerous large cities, and its ports of call and major international airports. Unfortunately, few Marylanders are aware of the presence of trafficking in the state, leaving traffickers hidden and children more vulnerable to exploitation.

Education and awareness are critical for the prevention of human trafficking. However, since human trafficking is such a specialized field, it is crucial that ***experts in the field of human trafficking and those with direct experience working with survivors should be involved in the development of the curriculum.*** Since new research and best practices regarding human trafficking are continuously evolving, ***the curriculum should be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure that it is reflective of the most recent knowledge of human trafficking. It is also recommended that any curriculum address both sex and labor trafficking.*** Additionally, any ***education on trafficking should include education on the safe and healthy use of technology and online communications to avoid violence and exploitation and education on healthy and non-violent relationships.***

For these reasons, the Maryland Catholic Conference asks for a favorable report with amendments on **HB 461**. Thank you for your consideration.

