



February 22, 2023

HB 603

Nonpublic Schools - School Health Services Program - Eligibility for Participation

House Ways & Means Committee

Position: FAVORABLE w/Amendment

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this supporting testimony, with amendments, for House Bill 603. 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.

We offer this testimony on behalf of the families of approximately 50,000 students served by over 150 PreK-12 Catholic schools in Maryland, as well as the one in every eight Maryland students educated in a nonpublic school, particularly in the nearly 400 schools that participate in the Aid to Nonpublic Schools Program. We offer this supporting testimony for the *sponsor-amended* version of the bill.

House Bill 603, as amended, would provide low-tuition nonpublic schools with a \$40 per pupil reimbursement for health services costs for their students. Reimbursement eligibility would be limited to schools that participate in the Aid to Nonpublic Schools Program, which ensures tuition below the state public school per pupil average and compliance with state nondiscrimination laws. Participation would be optional for nonpublic schools. Reimbursements may only be used toward the cost of employment of a registered nurse.

The existing need for school nursing services in our nonpublic schools has been increasingly clear in the last couple of years. There were already a significant number of lower-income Catholic schools throughout the state that could not afford to have full-time nurses on staff. Lower and middle-income nonpublic schools often charge one-half, or even one-third, of the tuition equivalent of the state per pupil average cost for public schools. Thus, their operating income often leaves them on small budgets. The ability to seek reimbursement for student health services would provide a much-needed benefit to students, particularly those who are low-income and minority. Schools are often forced to share part-time nurses with other schools.

Last year, the legislature directed the use of federal funds for a nonpublic school nursing program, but it was not an allowable use of those expenditures under federal law. Thus, this program is still very much needed.

Statewide, there are hundreds of Catholic and other nonpublic schools, educating nearly 120,000-plus students. Maryland's Catholic schools educate tens of thousands of lower and middle-income families every year, and we respectfully request your support for the amended version of House Bill 603 as a means of supporting those students.