



Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home

Responding to the cry of the Earth
and the cry of the poor.

Hearing before the House Economic Matters Committee
Maryland General Assembly
February 29, 2024

Statement of Support (FAVORABLE) of Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home on HB 864, Energy Efficiency and Conservation Plans

Maryland Catholics for Our Common Home (MCCH) is a lay-led organization of Catholics from parishes in the three Catholic dioceses in Maryland: the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington. It engages in education about, and advocacy based on, the teachings of the Catholic Church relating to care for creation. MCCH is a voice for the understanding of Catholic social teaching held by a wide array of Maryland Catholics—over 400 Maryland Catholics have already signed our statement of support for key environmental bills in this session of the General Assembly—but should be distinguished as an organization from the Maryland Catholic Conference, which represents the public policy interests of the bishops who lead these three dioceses.

MCCH would like to express its strong support for passage of House Bill 864, Energy Efficiency and Conservation Plans. As Catholics, we view care for God’s creation and care for vulnerable groups in society as an integral part of our faith, as taught by recent Popes, including the forceful statements of Pope Francis in his encyclical, *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*¹ (2015), and in his more recent apostolic exhortation, *Laudate Deum*² (2023).

In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis calls for a comprehensive response to the threats from climate change, including “an urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy.” (*Laudato Si’*, no. 26) He identifies “promoting ways of conserving energy” as an important line of action, including “removing from the market products which are less energy efficient or more polluting...and encouraging the construction and repair of buildings aimed at reducing their energy consumption and levels of pollution.” (*Laudato Si’*, no. 180) *Laudato Si’* also contains a call to “integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (*Laudato Si’*, no. 49).

The provisions of House Bill 864 build on the success of the EmPOWER program in ways that are consistent with the broad vision of Pope Francis. House Bill 864 ends incentives for the use of fossil fuels in home appliances and creates new incentives for electrification, efficient electric appliances, and home heating. Its provisions expand access for low-income households to state and federal funds for energy efficiency and whole-home retrofits. It also directs the Public Service Commission to set greenhouse gas emission reduction goals to align the program with Maryland’s climate goals, thereby increasing the coherence of State policies in this area.

Laudato Si’ and *Laudate Deum* herald a common message: The global environmental crisis is real. The clock is ticking. We must act now—and we must act courageously and decisively to correct our relationship with our common home. We cannot afford a failure of “conscience and responsibility” (*Laudate Deum*, no. 52). The expansions and improvements to the EmPOWER program in this bill will help Maryland to meet this environmental and moral challenge.

For these reasons we strongly urge your support for this bill. Thank you for your consideration of our views and our respectful request for a **favorable** report on House Bill 864.

¹ The English text of the encyclical, to which the paragraph numbers in the parentheses, can be found at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

² The English text of the apostolic exhortation, to which the paragraph numbers in the parentheses refer, can be found at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20231004-laudate-deum.html.