



**MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE**

February 28, 2024

SB 637

Higher Education - Undocumented Students - Out-of-State Tuition Exemption Eligibility

Senate Education, Energy & the Environment Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 637. 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.

In 2019, Senate Bill 537 of that year altered the circumstances under which some individuals, including undocumented immigrants, would be exempt from paying the out-of-state tuition rate at Maryland public institutions of higher education, making them eligible to pay an equivalent rate to the resident tuition rate at a public senior higher education institution. The Conference supported that legislation and now supports the amendment proposed by SB 637.

Senate Bill 637 would build upon that exemption, affording students the ability to pay in-state tuition where their parent or legal guardians have filed a Maryland income tax return in the preceding year. Current law requires a three-year period of state income tax filings in order to receive in-state tuition rates.

The Church's care of and concern for immigrants directly flows out of our belief that every immigrant is endowed with God given dignity and ought to be treated with love and respect. In fact, "The Church supports the human rights of all people and offers them pastoral care, education, and social services, no matter what the circumstances of entry into this country, and it works for the respect of the human dignity of all especially those who find themselves in desperate circumstances" (2000, *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity, A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops*).

By making a college education more accessible and affordable to Maryland youth, including undocumented youth, we are able to provide them with greater opportunities – opportunities for higher education, to acquire job skills, and to have a better chance of supporting themselves and their families in the future. The Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 637.