



**March 4, 2024**

**SB 918**

**Retail Choice Customer Education and Protection Fund - Purposes and Uses**

**Senate Education, Energy, & Environment Committee**

**Position: FAVORABLE**

The Maryland Catholic Conference submits this testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 918. 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.

Senate Bill 918 renames the Retail Choice Customer Education and Protection Fund to be the Education and Protection Fund and alters the purposes and permissible uses of the fund in order to educate customers on energy choices that help meet the State's climate commitments, as specified, and developing a training and educational program for electricity and gas suppliers.

As this bill helps meet the state's climate commitments, the Conference supports this bill to the extent that this bill advocate for Maryland's environment and care for our common home. In his encyclical, *On Care for Our Common Home (Laudato Si')*, Pope Francis reminds us of our sacred duty to safeguard the Earth, our common home, and to preserve its beauty and resources for present and future generations. Pope Francis tells us, "when we speak of the 'environment', what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it. Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behaviour patterns, and the ways it grasps reality. Given the scale of change, it is no longer possible to find a specific, discrete answer for each part of the problem."

Moreover, the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable is a foremost pillar of Catholic social teaching. The Church strongly supports the continuation of anti-poverty programs and responsible provision of basic utilities at an affordable cost is important. In his address on the Second World Day of the Poor (2018), Pope Francis clearly illustrated this importance in stating how "we are called to honour the poor and to give them precedence, out of the conviction that they are a true presence of Jesus in our midst. 'As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'" The Conference appreciates your consideration and respectfully urges a favorable report for Senate Bill 918.