



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 28, 2024

SB 620

Rehabilitation and Education for All Prisons (REAP) Act

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

Position: FAVORABLE

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of Senate Bill 620. 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 620 would require the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to ensure that incarcerated individuals are provided assistance in accessing federal Pell Grant funds to aid in obtaining postsecondary degrees. The bill also requires the department to regularly assess and track the participation and progress of inmates in educational endeavors.

In its pastoral statement *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice* (USCCB, 2000), the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops cited the “absence of educational opportunities” among considerations “contributing to a high rate of recidivism”. The USCCB also cited “education” as one of the key “necessities that enable inmates to live in dignity”.

The Conference firmly supports systems of restorative justice, as the same are rooted in our faith tenets. This bill seeks to bolster inmates' access to postsecondary educational opportunities. As such, it represents a core value in systems of truly restorative justice. As opposed to a lock-and-key system of punishment, this legislation would propel incarcerated individuals to a world of opportunity, enabling successful reintegration into society and empower formerly incarcerated individuals to experience the dignity of work and provide direction in their lives outside of the prison walls. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 620.