



**MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE**

February 29, 2024

SB 475

Center for Firearm Violence Prevention – Establishment

Senate Finance Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of Senate Bill 475. 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 475 would establish the Center for Firearm Violence Prevention with the Maryland Department of Health. The statutory goals of the Center will be to reduce firearm violence and misuse of firearms in the state by partnering with federal, state, and local agencies and affected communities to implement a public health approach to firearm violence reduction.

In 2022, a contingent of bishop chairmen from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), including our Maryland conference chairman Archbishop Lori of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, called the United States Congress to action on gun violence. Therein, the bishops stated “There is something deeply wrong with a culture where these acts of violence are increasingly common. There must be dialogue followed by concrete action to bring about a broader social renewal that addresses all aspects of the crisis, including mental health, the state of families, the valuation of life, the influence of entertainment and gaming industries, bullying, and the availability of firearms. Among the many steps toward addressing this endemic of violence is the passage of reasonable gun control measures.”

The Conference supports this legislation an important step in the right direction toward curbing gun violence in our state. Reflective of the bishop’s statement above, this legislation mandates a “public health” approach to gun violence prevention and will promote the necessary study, deliberation, and conversations for the state to formulate best practices regarding gun violence.

The Conference supports holistic, restorative policies that propose commonsense limitations on access to lethal weapons that endanger entire communities. When community members are not in fear of their lives, they can live up to their God-given potential and enrich the world around them. Every person has a right to life, and the Conference will continue to work to

combat violence and promote a culture of peace. Banning dangerous and lethal weapons such as untraceable firearms is a manageable and efficient way to curb the rising culture of violence. It is for these reasons that we request a favorable report on Senate Bill 475.