



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 7, 2024

HB 233

Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area Protection Program - Climate, Equity, and Administrative Provisions

House Environment & Transportation Committee

Position: Favorable

The Maryland 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.

House Bill 233 would modify the Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area Protection Program to incorporate climate resilience, environmental justice, and equity measures. The bill also extends the requirement that Critical Area maps be updated on a regular interval and makes various technical, conforming, and administrative changes. Under this legislation, regulations adopted by CAC must establish comprehensive standards and procedures to 1.) assess and adapt the Critical Area to climate-related changes including sea level rise, wetland migration, storm surge, precipitation-induced flooding, and other extreme weather events, 2.) enhance the resilience of the Critical Area by protecting, creating, and restoring natural and nature-based features; and 3.) promote environmental justice and equity initiatives that address disparate impacts of development and ensure the benefits of development, restoration, mitigation, and conservation are shared equitably.

As Pope Francis has written, climate change *“represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day”* (*Laudato Si'*, no. 25), threatening the wellbeing of peoples and the environment. Catholic social teaching envisions a sustainable and authentic human development, where technological solutions respect the principle of integral ecology and consider social, economic, and ecological considerations. In his encyclical, *On Care for Our Common Home (Laudato Si')*, Pope Francis tells us, *“Efforts to promote a sustainable use of natural resources are not a waste of money, but rather an investment capable of providing other economic benefits in the medium term”*.

House Bill 233 represents an investment in climate and environmental equity in Maryland. The Conference appreciates your consideration and respectfully urges a **favorable** report for House Bill 233.