



**MARYLAND  
CATHOLIC  
CONFERENCE**

**February 21, 2024**

**HB 1139**

**Growing Family Child Care Opportunities Pilot Program – Permanent Establishment**

**House Ways & Means Committee  
House Appropriations Committee**

**Position: FAVORABLE**

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of House Bill 1139. 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.

House Bill 1139 would make permanent the Growing Family Child Care Opportunities Program in the Department of Education, established through a pilot program in 2021 through HB 944 of that year. The creation of the pilot program was supported by the Conference. Through this bill, MSDE is afforded the ability to provide grants to local jurisdictions or child care licensing regions to increase the supply and ensure the sustainability of family child care providers in areas with higher numbers of low-income Marylanders. The bill mandates a very modest funding level of \$450,000, starting in FY 2026 and each fiscal year thereafter.

These grants would provide much needed support to a promote growth of a vital and essential sector of Marylander's everyday lives. Several hundred child care providers have been forced to close their doors in Maryland since early 2020, leading to less options for child care access for working families. The passage of this bill would help to reverse the trend of the declining number of child care providers in the state, thus providing greater access to child care options and stabilizing costs for Maryland parents.

Child Care is an essential component to supporting strong, economically secure families. Additionally, the Church supports this bill as a part of its priority interest in alleviating poverty in our state, as enabling working parents' continued access to child care services is an imperative part of combating poverty. Often, a barrier to sustainable and full-time employment is the availability and affordability of reliable child care services. The State should thus do all it can to support access to child care services for working parents.

The Conference appreciates your consideration, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 1139.