



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

March 6, 2025

HB506

Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act
Environment and Transportation Committee
Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) offers this testimony in support of **House Bill 506**. The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) 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 506 establishes the Maryland Leaders in Environmentally Engaged Farming (LEEF) Program, which aims to promote environmentally sustainable farming practices. It creates the LEEF Program Fund to support these efforts, expands the definition of "healthy soils" under the Maryland Healthy Soils Program, and exempts certain fishing license holders from needing a food establishment license. Additionally, it establishes the Water Quality Monitoring Program to enhance efforts in preserving the Chesapeake Bay's ecosystem.

The Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act reflects Catholic social teaching principles of stewardship of creation. By prioritizing sustainable farming and environmental preservation, it honors the interconnectedness of humanity and the environment. Pope Francis, in his encyclical "Laudato Si," emphasizes the urgent need for global action to address climate change and calls for responsible care of the planet. Establishing programs, such as the one in this bill, promote sustainable practices and upholds the moral imperative to care for creation while fostering economic justice for farmers and fishers, who often face economic vulnerabilities.

This bill advances environmental stewardship by supporting sustainable agriculture, improving soil health, and promoting water quality monitoring. By assisting farmers in adopting environmentally friendly practices, it ensures long-term agricultural productivity while protecting the Chesapeake Bay. The bill also reduces regulatory barriers for small-scale fishers, encouraging local economic development and food sustainability. Bills such as these are essential in ensuring that we are holding ourselves accountable and caring for our future.

The MCC appreciates your consideration and respectfully urges a favorable report for **House Bill 506**.