

House Bill 696**State Boards, Committees, Commissions, Task Forces, and Workgroups - Elimination of
Citizenship Requirements and Establishment of Diversity Requirements**

Health and Government Operations Committee

February 25, 2025

SUPPORT

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports HB696, which removes U.S. citizenship requirements for serving on state boards, committees, commissions, task forces, and workgroups while requiring these bodies to reflect Maryland's full diversity to the extent practicable. This bill would allow legal permanent residents and other qualified Maryland residents to serve their communities through these important public service roles.

For a century, Catholic Charities has provided care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. We accompany Marylanders as they age with dignity, support their pursuit of employment and career advancement, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve independence, prepare for educational success, and welcome immigrant neighbors into Maryland communities.

As the largest private provider of human services in the state, Catholic Charities of Baltimore carries out its mission through six core pillars, one of which is "Welcoming New Neighbors." Through our Esperanza Center, which has served as a vital resource for immigrants since 1963, we provide essential services in education, healthcare, immigration legal matters, family reunification, and general community support to help immigrants from all over the world navigate life in a new country. Our dedicated team of staff and volunteers works closely with thousands of immigrants each year, giving us firsthand insight into both the challenges they face and the valuable contributions they make to our communities. Many of these individuals possess significant professional expertise in healthcare, education, engineering, and other fields that could greatly benefit our state boards and commissions.

Maryland's boards and commissions make critical decisions affecting all state residents, including our immigrant communities. By removing citizenship requirements while mandating consideration of the state's diversity, this legislation will ensure these bodies better reflect and represent the communities they serve. This inclusive approach aligns with both democratic principles and Catholic social teaching on human dignity and participation. It also reflects our organizational experience that communities are strongest when all members can fully participate in civic life and public service.

For these reasons, Catholic Charities of Baltimore urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB696.

Submitted By: Madelin Martinez, Assistant Director of Advocacy