



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 27, 2025
HB579

Criminal Procedure - U Nonimmigrant Status Petitions
Judiciary Committee
Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) offers this testimony in support of **House Bill 579**. 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 579 modifies the certification requirements for U Nonimmigrant Status Petitions, which are designed to protect immigrant victims of crimes who assist law enforcement in investigations or prosecutions. It expands the individuals eligible to request certification and outlines the conditions under which certain information related to these petitions may be disclosed. Violent crimes can affect anyone, regardless of race, gender, sexuality, income level, or citizenship status. However, undocumented victims are often reluctant to report crimes due to fear of deportation. The U Nonimmigrant Status Petition (U-Visa) serves as a critical tool to counteract this dynamic by allowing victims and their families to remain in the United States for up to four years to assist in the prosecution of crimes committed against them.

Catholic social teaching emphasizes the protection of the vulnerable and the promotion of justice and solidarity. Immigrants facing exploitation or violence are among the most marginalized, and this legislation provides them with a pathway to safety and justice. Supporting this bill upholds the dignity of all individuals, encourages compassion for those in need, and aligns with the moral call to protect and uplift the most vulnerable members of society.

The current U-Visa process lacks clarity regarding what qualifies as "helpful" assistance from victims and at what stage in the process that assistance must occur. As a result, law enforcement officers often find themselves making de facto immigration determinations rather than focusing solely on certification. This can lead to inconsistencies and unnecessary barriers for victims seeking justice. This bill provides essential clarification on the definition of "helpful," ensuring a more straightforward process for both victims and law enforcement, ultimately leading to more effective investigations and prosecutions. As well as a safer Maryland for all individuals who regardless of status have dignity.

The MCC appreciates your consideration and respectfully urges a favorable report for **House Bill 579**.